

*Truly, I tell you,  
whatever you did for one of  
the least of these  
brothers and sisters of mine,  
you did for me.*  
~MATTHEW 25:40

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
November 22, 2020

***Leading in Worship Today:***  
***Ursula Damgaard, Music Director***  
***The Rev. Marta Z. Ukropina***  
***Kim Uwate, Liturgist***  
***Steve and Jeanie Halberg, Vocalists***

***Gathering Around God’s Word***

**Call to Worship**

**From Psalm 95**

**O come, let us sing unto the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our  
salvation.  
For the Lord is a great God;  
a great ruler over heaven and earth.**

**Opening Hymn**

***All People That on Earth Do Dwell*      #385**

**Call to Confession**

**With sincere and repentant hearts, let us name  
our sins against Christ and each other.**

## Prayer of Confession

**Sovereign God, we confess that we are not ready for your holy realm. You guide us toward right paths, but we refuse to follow where you lead. You love and feed and care for us, but we fail to love and serve others. Forgive us, merciful God, so that we may return to your fold and rejoice in your presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

## Assurance of Pardon

However long we wander, however far we stray, God's steadfast love endures forever. Sisters and brothers, be assured: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

## *The Word*

## Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open the eyes of our hearts by the power of your Spirit, that we may know the hope to which we have been called in Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

*Old Testament Reading: Psalm 95:1-7a*

O come, let us sing to the Lord;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
For the Lord is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his also.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.

*New Testament Reading: Matthew 25:31-46*

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.”

Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

**Anthem**      **Do Not Fear, For You are Mine**      David Lantz III

**Sermon**              **“Resolutions”**      The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

Have you made your New Year’s Resolutions, yet? If you are shaking your head no, then I hate to break it to you—you better get busy—you have just a few more days. Did I get your attention— are you looking at me like I am nuts? Uh, Marta? It’s November—we haven’t even celebrated Thanksgiving or Christmas, yet. 2021 still seems just a tad out of reach.

Well, you see, in one sense, I am actually right on time because today, November 22nd, is the last Sunday of the liturgical, or the church worshipping year. Today is what we refer to as Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday. Today is the day that the church gives thanks and praise for the sovereignty of Christ, who is lord of all creation and who is coming again in glory to reign.

Next week, we begin our journey toward the manger with great anticipation. We hope to once again encounter the newborn king who brings hope, peace, joy and love. We will prepare our hearts and minds to welcome and worship him —the baby who changed everything; sent to live among us and show us the way. This year, perhaps, our Advent journeys will feel different as we understand a bit more about what it means to wait and watch as we yearn for a return to some kind of normal. We wait with great hope for an

end to the pandemic that has separated us from so many things and people that we love. We watch as more lives are lost each day, as more hardships are realized, as the fear of the unknown starts to overtake us, and as people become more and more divided. We struggle to see the light shining in the darkness. We are indeed aware of our need for a savior and perhaps are more poised to welcome him as he enters our midst.

But, right now we are still waiting for advent to begin. We aren't there, yet. Today we are at the end of a liturgical year, here to celebrate Christ as King of all. Our companion to the Presbyterian Book of Common Worship says this: "Christ the King centers on the crucified and risen Christ, whom God exalted to rule over the whole universe. The celebration of the lordship of Christ thus looks back to Ascension, Easter, and Transfiguration, and points ahead to the appearing in glory of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ reigns supreme. Christ's truth judges falsehood. As the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, Christ is the center of the universe, the ruler of all history, the judge of all people. In Christ all things began, and in Christ all things will be fulfilled. In the end, Christ will triumph over the forces of evil. Behold the glory of the eternal Christ! From the beginning of time to its ending, Christ rules above all earthly powers!" That claim is a great way to end the year for sure (and look to a new one)!

It is a good time to re-prioritize and re-think as many of us do at the end of the calendar year—a good time to set resolutions as I mentioned at the start of this sermon. But here is a little secret—I don't think I have actually ever made New Year's Resolutions—it just has never been a part of my life. When I hear the word New Year's Resolution, the first thing that comes to mind is a commercial for gym membership or weight loss products. Just like everything else, New Year's Resolutions seem to be commercialized—tied in with buying something to better your life. But, the concept of New Year's

Resolutions have been around for centuries. The Babylonians and ancient Romans would make promises to gods or to one another to repay debts and live more upright lives. I discovered a resolution postcard online which dates back to 1900 and it spoke to me. I then began to think that maybe now, as another church year draws to a close, isn't a bad time to think about resolutions for the new year.

Here is what it said:

A Resolve for Every Morning of the New Year  
I will this day try to live a simple, sincere, and serene life repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity and self-seeking/ cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence/ exercising economy in expenditure, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust and a child-like trust in God.

It really spoke to me and echoes many things that scripture calls us to do—many of the things illustrated in our gospel text from Matthew.

Our text today is well known and one that many a mission committee or religious mission agency quote. When you hear the phrase “least of these” you call this text to mind.

Perhaps the important resolution given to us in the text is “when you do unto the least of these, you do to me.” We are called to take care of the least of these and to make that a part of life. It isn't supposed to be a chore or a “one and done” type thing. As in—well, I served at the soup kitchen that one year at Thanksgiving—I cared for the least of these that day, didn't I? Check!

Instead, it is to be a way of life—part of our identity as Christians. It is a life long calling and if we are honest

—it is probably something that we have to work at our whole lives. It isn't easy especially when the least of these might not even recognize or want our care. It is not easy as often the least of these make us feel uncomfortable or vulnerable.

The text this morning speaks of the end times or the judgement and God separating people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Those who followed God's commands and cared for the least of these are welcomed into the fullness of the kingdom. Whereas those who did not are sent to eternal punishment. One of the unsettling things to the reader here is the fact that the "goats" were not necessarily separated for doing something bad or evil, but rather, they were separated because of their lack of merciful care. They were apathetic at best; knowingly turning away from those in need at worst.

God teaches us how to live through Jesus Christ. Caring for the least of these is a way of life and one that is modeled by Christ our King. If we think about Jesus' ministry, we frequently see him caring for the least of these—those that society wanted nothing to do with: the leper, women, the tax collector, children, the widow, those considered unclean or possessed by demons, the blind, the poor and destitute. And Jesus approached all of them with love and concern. To him, they had a place in society, and more importantly in God's kingdom. God's love and Kingdom was not reserved for the elite or the powerful, but instead God's Kingdom was and is for all.

How we live our lives and who we show love to reflects how closely we follow Christ and his calling upon us. Because Christ is King of all, we are freed from the powers that seek to separate us or destroy us—we are freed from sin—and we are free to love each other and care for each other. We are free to care for the least of these.

In our baptisms we are reminded of the promise of our identity as God's beloved child and in our baptisms we are called to a life of faith. We are called to let our light shine to all we meet.

Think for a moment—who are those people in your life that reflect God's light and love? Who are those people who are there quietly working, caring for the least of these, living lives of mercy—their lives seem to be an offering to God? We all have people we can think of. Perhaps they are someone everyone is aware of like Mother Teresa, but perhaps they are people known only to you. Someone who lives a life of faith in all they do. They always seem to be upholding the least of these—caring for their neighbor—exuding Christ's love.

And how about you? How do you care for the least of these? How do you heed God's call and follow the lead of Jesus? We are all sent to be Christ's body in the world. And God gives us all the tools necessary to do so because in fact, all we need is Christ's love and mercy working in and through us.

See this resolution thing actually works here. We can resolve each day to follow Christ, to share God's love and to care for the least of these. We can do this our whole life long.

Pray today that God may equip you with all the tools necessary to care for each other; to really love as Christ has loved us. Through the power of Christ we can do all things!

During this lock down time, this may look a bit different. But there are things we can always do: We can always pray—pray for God to open your heart to new ways to serve and care for the least of these.

Send notes or make a phone call—is there someone you know who could use a kind word, someone who



is entering into their first holiday season after the death of a loved one? Someone who is really isolated during this quarantine time? A child in your life who is entering their 8th month of virtual school? Someone you know who has lost their job or is without meaningful work?

Support a local mission agency with a heart for serving the least of these. You can also do this by supporting the work of our mission committee at church. Be an advocate and a voice for those who have been long silenced.

Make changes in your daily interactions with others. Are you always too busy or frazzled to really look and see what's going on around you? Can you slow down and really see others? How can you offer simple acts of kindness to people you encounter? Do you treat everyone you come into contact with as a child of God?

And when it is safe to gather together in groups again, how can you serve the least of these here in our own church? Do you have a heart for ministry to shut-ins or to children? To those who are grieving or going through dark valleys?

The least of these are everywhere we turn and we are never too old to care for each other in this way. There really is no "been there, done that." Doing to the least of these is a lifelong calling. It is a way that we follow Christ and share God's love with everyone. Before Advent begins next week, really think about your Resolutions for a new church year. If we truly believe and confess that Christ is King, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, ruling over all creation and freeing us from all ills, then serving the least of these becomes less of a chore and more of a way of life. It is how we exhibit God's love for each and every person. It is

how we worship and praise him, proclaiming to all the world that Christ is the Prince of Peace and the Lord of Lords.

Jesus said: "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Go, and do likewise.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### *Responding to God's Word*

Affirmation of Faith

Philippians 2:5-11

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

### Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

More than all things visible or invisible,  
beyond pressures and powers and politics,  
before all that has been and long after all that  
will be, you alone are God.

Look favorably upon us, O LORD, as we come to  
you. Remember your reputation of goodness

as we lift up the cares of our lives and our world.

Be a hiding place for those who live in fear and a shelter to those at risk. But more than that: bring about an end to war and an intolerance of violence so that peace and healing might reign with you.

When the mountains in our lives tremble by events of illness or death or chaos, comfort our souls with the wellspring of hope that is your unfailing love.

Gather up all who feel lost and alone. Remember those who are forgotten or cast out. Hold us together in community as we have not been able to do within the limits of our own perspectives and the limits of the pandemic.

Let our lives be shaped not so much by fear or the shoring up of false securities, but shaped and reshaped and reimagined for the work of witnessing to your presence in all of life.

Yours is the past, yours is the future, yours is this day. In all things, we rejoice that we are never beyond your grace, that this world is not beyond your reign! Let us pray together:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

### *Sending of God's Word*

**Closing Hymn: *Together We Serve***

**#767**

**Benediction**

**May the grace of Christ surround you, the love of  
God astound you, and the Holy Spirit keep you, this  
day and forevermore.**