

Who is Jesus asking us to see?
Matthew 25:31-46

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Our annual pledge campaign – a time at St. Peter's when we ask you to pray and ponder what you will pledge to St. Peter's in the upcoming year – has just come to an end (although we are still accepting pledges 😊). So if you are thinking about pledging and haven't done so, please send yours in as soon as you can.

Part of my practice the past few years has been to hand write thank you notes to those who pledged. I learnt about this practice at a workshop on stewardship and pledging where the importance of saying thank you was emphasized. I thought it was daunting when I first heard of it, but over the years of writing these notes, it has become a task I enjoy.

The note begins with thanking them for their pledge of X amount per week, per month and so on. Then I think about the gifts that the person or their family brings and continue the note with my gratefulness for their presence in our community or something specific they do at St. Peter's. You see I pray for our St. Peter's community but with the demands of pastoral care, I don't always have time to stop and focus on the "gift" that each of you brings. I enjoy writing these notes because it allows me to stop and 'see' the person I am writing to and give God thanks for them.

There are always those we don't see or think about. Often it isn't that we are purposely trying not to see them, but rather that whatever is happening in our lives has us looking the other way.

In our gospel on this Christ the King Sunday, I hear Jesus asking us to pause. Look around. Who don't you see? How are they being treated because you don't see them? We have a king who asks us to look at those that the world doesn't see – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the one in prison, the sick. There are so many other categories of people we don't see.

I remember back when I was in Washington DC and was carpooling with two other clergy to clergy conference. It was about a two and a half hour drive. One clergy person I knew very well. The other I had seen from time to time. We got to talking and the clergy person who I didn't know that well – an older man who was retired - commented that we had never really spoken before. He said often he felt dismissed and that the active clergy were always busy with those that they knew and never seemed to find time to talk with him. I realized that I was one of them and apologized. It was true. I had seen him, but never made an effort to talk with him. I wouldn't say that he was angry – just pointing something out. We had a great conversation. I got to know a gem of a person and learnt a valuable lesson.

What is really intriguing about this gospel is the 'righteous' don't even know what they have done – that they have seen and cared for Christ. They were just doing what they did – looking after the hungry, the thirsty and the stranger. They seem to have an

innate sense to look after the lost – the unseen, those in trouble. In doing so to their surprise, they have not just encountered Christ but looked after him. It was their practice in their lives.

It makes me think about an encounter I had with Bishop Tutu. He was speaking at our seminary's commencement. I was an usher positioned in the entry way. Bishop Tutu was late and as he entered the building, he was being rushed along by his handlers. However, Bishop Tutu insisted on stopping and shaking the hand of every one of us 'not so important' people standing in that entry way including the janitor. It was clear that he had a practice of looking for those others do not see even if it made him late.

As I pondered this gospel, I realized that not seeing the other could even happen in the opposite way. It might be very possible to be so engaged with helping the hungry and the thirsty that one doesn't see the need of a family member. The key is to stay alert. To practice seeing one another.

It occurred to me that Thanksgiving might be a great time to practice this alertness. I expect that our gatherings will be smaller and perhaps take place over zoom, but even so who is it that you don't see? Who is it that you avoid? What would happen if you ask that person a question and see where it goes? If someone is quiet on your zoom call, you could say well Aunt Jane, we haven't heard from you yet. What have you got to say?

I think it is especially important in this time of political divide that we take time to see one another – that we practice that seeing – because we see what we think we see in another person may not be where they are coming from. This past week, I heard about an organization called Braver Angels whose work is to bring our nation together to work on common goals and to respect one another.

In one of their intro videos, they point out that America has always had deep political disagreements, but that these days we have gotten to a point where we can't even talk to one another. What has changed is that we don't just think that political opponents are simply wrong or misguided. We see the other side as bad people whose ways of thinking are dangerous and incomprehensible. Their purpose is to bring people together not to agree, but to change the way they think about one another. I would put this way. They are working to help people on opposite sides 'see' one another.

One practice you could take up would be to take a look at their website – braverangels.org. There is a lot of information on there and lots of ways to learn from online workshops including one about Family and Politics to Braver Angel Debates which take on some pretty tough topics. I started with the video called 'Introducing Braver Angels' which is at the bottom of their front page. The video gave me encouragement that people from both sides could find ways to talk.

In the end, we are all brothers and sisters in God's family and Jesus asks us to see one another whether it is the homeless person, the prisoner, the sick, the outsider, the family

member everyone ignores or the person who voted for the other political party. When we start to truly 'see' one another, we bring God's kingdom here on earth and experience the blessings that God pours on us.