

MESSAGE – Faith Promise 2023

November 12, 2023

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Every month we make a shared proclamation of our faith:

In the communion liturgy:

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

That faith proclamation is how we begin every funeral service as well. The proclamation begins with: "Jesus said I am the resurrection and I am life" and it ends with "Christ will come again in glory"

The first part of those proclamations "Christ has died. Christ is risen." And "Jesus said I am the resurrection and I am life" are at the heart and height of the holy season of Easter – which includes a lot of pomp and celebration.

But what about the rest of those faith proclamations:

Christ will come again

Christ will come again in glory

That part of our faith proclamation also gets its own celebration: in two weeks with Christ the King Sunday....

Celebrates the return and ultimate victory of Jesus over every form of evil and death and destruction with a new heaven and a new earth.

Now to recognize Christ the King Sunday, we might focus on "when" this is going to happen - reading the signs of the times and measuring them with what is written in Scripture.

Or we might focus on "if" this is going to happen - which the earliest Christians wondered about because it was taking forever.

Or we might focus on "how" it will happen - entertaining the cataclysmic events such as the rapture, the moon turning to blood or Jesus' return on clouds of glory.

But today's lesson that comes to us begs us to make the proclamation "that" it will happen.

And it helps us to understand a bit more about what is important to our faith here and now.

SCRIPTURE Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

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The story helps us to realize that when this happens, the end of the day is taking place and there is no more "business as usual". As a matter of fact, on that day we will not be

worried/consumed/thinking about the things that we spend so much time worrying/being consumed by/and thinking about.

Like our material/economic lives

Or our political machinations and power struggles

No, on that day, what's going to matter is how we treated Christ.

And that doesn't mean how many crosses we hung on our walls or around our necks, how many Christian concerts we went to, or fish symbols we put on our bumpers.

And dare I say, on that day Jesus doesn't seem to look at our church attendance either.....gasp!.....not that it is unimportant.

But Jesus is concerned with how we treated him by caring

for his basic human needs like food and water and shelter and clothing and friendship?

And the people are surprised by that – because they ask “When did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked?”

And Jesus makes it definitively clear that how we treated others – particularly those who don't seem to belong; those who live on the margins of society; those who can't return any favors to us – is how we have treated him.

James, Jesus' brother, understood this and explained it in a very clear and direct way:

James 2:14-17

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

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People who show care and concern and serve others as a part of their faith, well they understand; they have received the proclamation of Jesus with a lived-out response of generosity and practical good news to others.

These lessons are very clear: that a life of generosity helps us align ourselves to God's kingdom principles and values.

And if you have any question if First Church helps us to live like this, aligning ourselves with the kingdom's priorities, let me remind us today of our Faith Promise program (through which we share our monetary resources that go out to make a difference in the world beyond our church's everyday budget).....

Which reminds me of the story of the grease factory:

While I can't lift up all your individual stories of generosity and care for others, I can celebrate what our Faith Promise program has been able to answer to the parable questions:

Lord when was it that we see you hungry or thirsty?

CLFP	2,000
Friday Food distribution	5,000
Summon 2 Serve	25,000

Lord when was it that we saw you a stranger?

Buddy Break	5,000
Rainbow Kids	500
Preschool scholarship	5,000
World Relief	10,000

Lord when was it that we saw you needing clothes (shelter)

UMCOR	6,000
Epworth	1,000
H4H	5,000
ASP	20,000
Home of the Sparrow	1,000

Lord when was it that we saw you sick or in prison?

Global Hope Partners	5,000
Refuge for Women	5,000
Bethany Hope Home	5,000
Youth service days	900

Thank you for your generosity this year that has supported life-giving ministries to the tune of \$100,000!

This week you will be getting a letter and information about next year's Faith Promise program and next Sunday, we will have the opportunity to make a pledge as an act of worship.

Because we are called to be sheep
And I hope that is what Jesus sees us as when he does return.

Let's pray:

Lord, you have rescued each one of us as a sheep of your own flock. Give us grace to live as your sheep, caring for you by caring for others. Amen.