

Recognizing Jesus Christ

Christ the King (Year A)

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Have you ever had the experience of seeing someone who looked familiar to you, but you couldn't quite place them? 'What is their name? Where do I know them from? Will they recognize me? Maybe it is not the person I'm thinking of.' That is the experience we oftentimes have of Jesus Christ.

In our Gospel passage today, the righteous actually had a hard time identifying Jesus Christ. After making it into the kingdom of heaven, they asked themselves, 'from where do I know this man? He seems familiar.' They say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?" They honestly did not remember.

Like the righteous, identifying Jesus Christ is challenging for us. Since we do not know what he physically looked like, it is even harder. How can we recognize a man who we have never met in real life? This Gospel passage from Matthew 25 gives us a big hint. In it, Jesus Christ says, "amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did for me."

Identifying Jesus Christ is not a matter of looking for a Middle Eastern Jewish man that lived 2,000 years ago. That is impossible. According to the Gospel, our job is to identify him by looking towards the people who are considered the least among us- the poor, the

marginalized, the outcast, the stranger, the forgotten, and as an example for our country, the African American population.

Jesus Christ associated and continues to associate with the least among us. The prophet Ezekiel said long ago, “the lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal.” Lest we sentimentalize this too much, Ezekiel continues, “but the sleek and the strong I will destroy, shepherding them rightly.” Even Jesus in our Gospel has harsh words for those who ignore the least among us: “depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Recognizing Jesus Christ in the least among us isn’t something extra, optional, additional, or even political. It is our eternal judgment.

Our salvation depends upon the willingness to recognize Jesus Christ in the least among us.

Question: Can I recognize Jesus Christ in someone who is considered lesser than me?

In their 2018 declaration, ‘Reclaiming Jesus,’ a few dozen Christian leaders referenced this Gospel passage and wrote, “God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are oppressed, strangers, outsiders, or otherwise considered marginal is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love. Our proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ is at stake in our solidarity with the most vulnerable.” On this feast of Christ the King, may we stand in solidarity with the least among us, for when we do that, we will start to recognize Jesus Christ more readily.