

WEEK THREE What are you doing for others?

SCREEN: The Crown image

I may have told you that I'm a fan of the Netflix series, The Crown, and season four was released last week.

If you're unfamiliar, The Crown tells the story of the British Royal Family.

It spans nearly a century beginning when Queen Elizabeth was a young princess, up to today.

For some viewers, watching the show can be an escape, a break from the routine of everyday life.

They imagine what life would be like as a prince or princess, a king or queen - to have an army of attendants bowing and scraping, seeing to your every need or want.

To be honest, watching the new season hasn't been as enjoyable for me as past years and I've struggled to figure out why.

The acting is still incredible, the production values are top-notch, the story lines are compelling, so what's different this year?

And I realized that I'm different, life is different, our world is different from last year.

In 2020, it's not an escape to watch leaders who appear so out of touch with the lives of the people they're called to serve.

People whose privilege and lifestyle blind them to the suffering all around them - even suffering within their own family.

SCREEN: It's The End of The World main screen

We've come to the final week of our message series titled, *It's The End of The World as We Know It....and I feel fine.*

Today is also the final week of our Church year - Advent and a new year begins next Sunday.

In our celebration today of Christ The King, we focus our attention on another crown and on a leader who shows us what true service looks like.

Each week of this series, we've heard some

really challenging Gospel readings and today's is the most challenging of all.

And because they're so challenging,
they probably aren't anyone's favorite readings.

Week One it was the parable of the wedding feast.

Jesus told a story about five foolish virgins who were
locked out of the celebration because
they were unprepared to meet the bridegroom.

Last week's parable of the talents ended with one servant
cast out into the darkness for burying his talent in the ground.

Today Jesus described the Last Judgment.

He said that at the end of time he will separate humanity into two groups -
just like a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

The sheep are the faithful ones who go off to eternal life.

The goats were unfaithful and go off to eternal damnation.

Jesus probably had our first reading in mind when he described the Last Judgment.

The Prophet Ezekiel said God is a shepherd who
seeks out the lost sheep,
binds up the injured, and heals the sick.

Ezekiel's passage ended with this warning from God:

SCREEN: **but the sleek and the strong I will destroy,
shepherding them rightly.**

As for you, my sheep, says the Lord GOD,

I will judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats.

Jesus got very specific in listing what a person needs to do
to be rewarded with eternal life.

He said:

*feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty,
welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick,
and visit the prisoner.*

If we do these things we show we are members of his flock.

We will live with Christ forever in heaven.

If we don't do these things, eternal punishment awaits us.

I think for lots of people the Last Judgement Jesus describes flies in the face of their image of a loving, merciful God - a God who doesn't want to ever be separated from his children who are the sheep of his flock.

We don't want to believe that hell exists.

Or if there is a hell, it's reserved for the Hitlers and Stalins and mass murderers.

How do we reconcile our image of Jesus the Good Shepherd with Jesus the Judge sending people to hell?

If you read today's Gospel carefully, who decides humanity's fate?

It's the individual who decides based on the way they chose to live their life.

Eternal destiny won't be decided based on a person's resume or how successful they were in life, how much money they made or how many people they had serving them.

No, it's whether they saw others through the eyes of God.

Meaning they didn't turn a blind eye to their brothers and sisters in need.

They weren't out of touch with the suffering around them - didn't ignore the hungry, the naked and the stranger in their midst.

They served rather than be served and made the world a better place.

With today's Gospel, Jesus our teacher, is giving us all the answers to the final exam, saying to all who would follow him,

"Here's how to ace the test: serve those in need to build my Kingdom."

Now, let me make one really important point about the Last Judgement.

God alone is the judge.

We must avoid the temptation to hear this Gospel and then start pointing fingers at others, condemning this person or deciding that group will be damned.

Jesus wants this Gospel to be like a mirror we hold up

to reflect our lives, because first and foremost this is about our own salvation.

Salvation we secure by accepting Jesus as our savior and imitating his example.

And when others see us loving and caring for others like Jesus, they are drawn to His Kingdom - they want what we have.

Last month, Pope Francis made this very point when he said this:

SCREEN: "We each face a choice between what counts and what doesn't, between continuing to ignore the suffering of the poorest and mistreating our common home, Earth, or transforming our way of acting."

-Pope Francis Oct. 10 2020

So the choice is ours:

we can spend our lives on what really counts - loving and caring for those in need

OR we can spend our lives on what doesn't count -

by ignoring and mistreating others.

Members of Christ's flock who want to live with him eternally,

must put their faith into practice every day by serving the least among us.

The common theme running through all three Gospels in this series is

that you and I are here on earth for a purpose,

to build Christ's Kingdom.

It's not enough to say you love God.

And it's not enough to pray to God.

Those who truly follow Christ love and serve God and others with everything they've got.

SCREEN: in the face of life's challenges are you making the lives of others better?

So let me ask you this question:

in the face of life's challenges are you making the lives of others better?

This past year, we've all faced enormous challenges:

disruptions to our lives, the lives of our family members,

worries about our health, our finances, our safety, and the future of our nation.

And in the face of all that, did your words and actions make the lives of others easier or harder?

Were you more understanding, helpful, forgiving, joyful, and encouraging.

Did you see people who were struggling, whether they were family members, neighbors, or strangers and did you put yourself at their service?

If you can answer “yes”, then rest easy knowing you will be counted among the sheep of Christ’s flock.

And if you know you didn’t, it’s never too late to make your way back to the fold.

I can confidently predict that the rest of 2020 and the first part of 2021 will be just as challenging, if not more.

There will be opportunities every day to feed the hungry, comfort the sick, and welcome the stranger.

This week’s bulletin presents you with some and in coming weeks we will offer you more ways to serve those in need.

SCREEN: The Crown image (again)

One of the most memorable scenes in The Crown happened in season one - the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.

At that moment, she swore an oath of service to the United Kingdom.

As this Church year comes to an end, let us renew our allegiance to Christ and his Kingdom.

As members of his family, let us serve him by putting our faith into practice everyday. Amen. +