

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-46

Sermon Title: "Like Royalty"

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"What would Jesus do?" This question, often abbreviated to WWJD, took off in popularity in the 1990's when a youth minister in Holland, Michigan first made bracelets bearing these letters for her youth to wear in their daily life. And these bracelets bearing this question stood as a reminder of the call to live out the love of Jesus in the world. Now of course, what is at the core of this question was not a new idea when this youth minister, Janie Tinklenberg in Holland, Michigan placed the letters WWJD onto a bracelet. This question was asked more than a century earlier by a Congregational minister, Charles Shelton, in Topeka, Kansas when he wrote a book entitled "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?" And long before that, the idea of imitating Christ was already an important part of the Catholic Church's teachings, and even further back, we will recall how the Apostle Paul proclaims the church as being the body of Christ and just a little further back, we remember that when Jesus called the disciples, he said, "Follow me."

Yes, indeed, in many different forms, this idea has been around since the beginning of Christ's ministry - this idea of following, of imitating, of doing what Jesus would do. And clearly, there is an importance in asking this question and there is a desire that transcends the history of the church to live by this question - to live a life that shines the love and light of Christ in the world. And when we hold this question, even though we will still have moments when we do not do things perfectly, by asking this question we are attune to this aspect of discipleship - as we seek to follow and imitate Christ in our world.

However, today, I want to propose another question that Jesus calls us too ask in our scripture reading from the Gospel of Matthew. I want us to consider today not only "what would Jesus do?" but "what would we do to Jesus?" In the reading today from Matthew, as Jesus is talking about judgement, sitting on the throne and separating the

goats from the sheep, he provides us with a look into what the criteria, if you will, looks like. In the case of those who made it and inherited eternal life, he said "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." And for those who didn't he said, "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." And in both cases, the people ask essentially the same question of "when did we see you in such need, Jesus?" and Jesus replied with "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these (referring to anybody in need)...you did it to me."

What would we do to Jesus? This question, which our scripture calls us to ask, is similar and yet different enough to the question of "what would Jesus do?" When we ask, "what would Jesus do", we are essentially saying, if Jesus was in our shoes, facing the same situation we are facing, how would he handle it? And this of course can be applied to many aspects of our life and many of the decisions and dilemmas that we face. Whereas the question of "what would we do to Jesus" is much more specific - when we are faced with a situation impacting another person, when we are face-to-face with another, if Jesus was in the shoes of the other person, if we saw that person as Jesus, what would we do?

In life, there are no shortages of encounters with the people around us. Some may be good friends, some acquaintances, some strangers, some people who are not friends but also not strangers, some may even borderline on enemies (and enemy may be strong word, only you can decide if that distinction works in your life). And yet, if we looked at all of our daily encounters as encounters with Jesus, how would our actions change? How would it change the ways we treat the people in our lives? How would it effect the ways in which we care? If we look upon the people we meet daily as if they were Christ the King, what would be different - what would we do differently?

Beloved people of God, Jesus calls us to treat the individuals in our lives, whether we encounter them daily or encounter them only once, like royalty - like we would treat Jesus who reigns in our hearts, in our lives, in our world. This may not always be easy, especially when the person we are facing does not appear to be imitating Christ in their lives, but that doesn't matter here. Jesus doesn't say that the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the strangers, the sick, the imprisoned, have to be leading a life that reflects the life of Jesus in order to receive help. But simply, if we encounter someone in need, we must offer care and compassion as if that need was held by none other than Jesus.

What would Jesus do and what would we do to Jesus? We will not always get the answers to these questions right. We will not always end up doing what Jesus would have done or treating another as if we were encountering Christ. And we trust that as we grow in our faith, that God's grace and love will meet us always in the areas where we fall short. But, no matter what, we should continue to ask the questions. For the questions cause us to pause, even if only for a moment, rather than reacting impulsively and they remind us to live out our faith daily - to live out our faith moment-to-moment.

You know, as I was doing some research on the origin of the WWJD bracelets, I found another bracelet that offered one answer to this question. This bracelet had the acronym FROG, which stood for Fully Rely on God. Which led me to look for a possible abbreviated answer to the question WWWD TJ, what would we do to Jesus? From our scripture today, and as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday, THLR seems to work - treat him like royalty. That when we encounter someone and we are deciding how to respond to them, we should treat them like Christ on the Throne, treat them like Jesus who reigns within our hearts, treat them like royalty. WWWD TJ and THLR may not roll off the tongue as easy as WWJD and FROG and they may not catch on as bracelet material, but they will do. May we always hold these questions and pursue their answers faithfully as we live and as we serve. Amen.