



**“EVEN SO, WE ACKNOWLEDGE”**

**SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 25: 31-46**

**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**Sunday, November 26, 2023**

The Rev. Dr. Marcia Whitney Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Matthew 25:31-46**

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

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 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.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The Word of the LORD  
**Thanks be to God.**

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This "Even So, We..." fall series. Been in Paul's letters, now we culminate in one of the most well known texts of the Christian scriptures. In the church year, this is called Christ the King Sunday. A dicey day liturgically. It can easily lapse into Christian triumphalism and judgment. So, we will work hard today to resist that temptation. Jesus will show us the way.

The passage starts in a pretty sobering vein—one of judgment and separating nations and peoples based on what they have done to the most vulnerable. Then the passage goes into some of the most famous language of scripture.

*...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.'*

When did we see you, Lord? To do all these things, to be all these things? When you did it to the least of these, he says, you did it to me.

Jesus is the stranger. The immigrant without documentation. Jesus is the person on death row. Jesus is the person who struggles with mental illness and sleeps on the street. Jesus is the person who got laid off and has to have his family sleep at the shelter because the car won't be able to stay warm enough when it goes below freezing.

Jesus is the trans youth who now lives in a state where they cannot get health care. Jesus is the single mom with 4 jobs who still can't afford an apartment in Asheville. Jesus is the prophet calling for reparations for Black people. Jesus is the person we're too busy to visit. Jesus is the one we don't understand, the one we project things onto, the one we blame for all our problems.

Matthew 25 is a passage about a lived, active faith.

(Talk about Matthew 25 initiative)

- Matthew 25 congregation, presbytery, denomination. We became a Matthew 25 congregation on 8/25/2020 by a unanimous vote of the Session.
- Our presbytery became a Matthew 25 presbytery in July 2020.
- The PCUSA Began this initiative/movement on April 1, 2019

**(put these three things up on the screen, split screen for live stream)**

- **Dismantling Structural Racism**
- **Eradicating Systemic Poverty**
- **Building Congregational Vitality**

Diane Moffett,

“Jesus’ kingdom is not only a place you go to, but a place you come from. ... It’s the kind of principles, it’s the kind of

teachings, it's the kind of radical inclusiveness and love and justice that Jesus demonstrates in his life. There's great joy in it, because people are set free. People have that abundance, that life to the full. ... But I also say, what we signed up for is not easy. Who wants to take up the cross? You do it when you have come into that life-giving relationship. You see the beauty of what happens when chains are broken and people are set free, because you have experienced it viscerally. You know it for yourself. We're not just another social service agency. It's out of our faith we do it. ... Jesus was very political in nature. Of course, he was executed by the state. It was because of the love, it was because of the truth, it was because of the systems that he was critiquing."

In Matthew 25, Jesus offered a critique of nations and systems.

"He's judging nations — how the nations treat people," Moffett said. "The nations create systems that create access to food, or not. Access to clean water or not. Access to shelter, or not — to health care, to justice. Nations create or do not create that. It's a systemic approach to that Scripture. It challenges us individually, but it speaks to us as nations and as systems."<sup>1</sup>

**(Take down the three focus areas here)**

"To be a church committed to active engagement in the world." — Diane Moffett, Executive Director of the PMA

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pres-outlook.org/2019/04/the-matthew-25-initiative-a-conversation-with-diane-moffett/>

## Show Diane Moffett Video 3:52

When GCPC became a Matthew 25 congregation it was an acknowledgment of the work we are already doing. And as our denomination changes, and becomes less centered in white comfort, the work we are doing at GCPC aligns more and more with what it means to be a part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We are on the leading edge in our work around dismantling white supremacy, and we are also modeling how these three areas of focus feed each other. Our congregation is growing and vital because of the work we are doing around structural racism and systemic poverty.

Jesus is there when we don't know it—in the people who challenge our ways of being, our ways of doing. Jesus is there in the moral conscience challenged.

Ways GCPC is embodying the three areas of emphasis in the Matthew 25 movement.

We were already doing it—the belief that the church is called to be prophetic and compassionate. Faith is political—Jesus was political, the prophets were political. As a feminist I believe there is no part of love that is not political. The personal is political.

Health care

Housing

Education

Economy

Military

Jobs

Childcare  
Immigration  
Environment

These things impact our everyday lives.

Our faith calls us to bring a commitment to justice, to radical welcome, to right relationship, to good stewardship of the earth and resources to the polis, to the city center, to the civic conversation.

We are people who believe in the common good, in abundance, in no justice, no peace. That comes from the prophets.

They provoked rulers and those under the thumb of unjust systems. They troubled the waters for the complacent, and steadied the ship for those set adrift by the resource hoarding of the rich.

Matthew 25 is about faithful people and faithful churches being who God calls us to be.

Moffett: “we read scripture and scripture reads us”

**Some about GCPC Context:**

The budget is a moral document:

- Finance
- Formation
- Personnel
- Property
- Serve
- Worship

## Teams:

- PART
- Earth Team
- Long Range Building Visioning Team
- Creating Sanctuary Team

## Covenant Partners:

- Faith 4 Justice
- La Milpa Collectiva
- SOS
- Racial Justice Coalition
- YTL
- JMPRO Media
- Center for Participatory Change
- CoThink
- WNC Workers Center

Also funded Project Lighten Up—another after school program for Black and Brown kids at Rock Hill Missionary Baptist church.

Many more Ministry Partners like BeLoved, Pisgah Legal, Habitat for Humanity, Hood Huggers, Hands and Feet of Asheville, The Children's Center at Gracelyn, AYM, etc.

We are learning and growing in being a both/and congregation. Prophetic and pastoral. Bold and humble. Courageous and compassionate.

There is a fine line between being a Matthew 25 congregation and being white saviors.

There is a fine line between working to make the world a better place and working to maintain the status quo.

There's a fine line between being agents of change and liberation in Christ name and being those who prop up unjust systems.

If all we do are ministries of compassion, food kitchens, Emergency shelters, toy drives, we are not doing anything to change the conditions that produce the need for such emergency aid and we're also enabling governments to do less and less in terms of a social safety net.

If all we are doing is being prophetic and never engaging in direct and mutual aid for those who are suffering then we run the risk of just being ideologues, people who dream of a better world, people who talk the talk, but don't walk the walk, don't do anything to put it into motion for the world to change.

We need to be a both/and people, that's what Matthew 25 initiative is about, that's what our work around dismantling white supremacy is about. That's what our Mission Statement is about.

The world needs to change so we need to change.

We are practicing, we are learning, we are growing in our capacity to be both prophetic and pastoral, both compassionate and morally courageous.



We are learning what it feels like to embody beloved community that is truly for all people—community not built on the architecture of racialized disadvantage, community not built on the impulse to hoard and withhold resources.

We are learning what it feels like to both share and receive abundant compassion when we stop othering and start being honest about our shared vulnerability.

As we enter our Advent journey next week, GCPC, there is no better place to start than right here where Christ the King disrupts, dismantles, and divorces himself from the trappings of formal power and privilege of his day.

Jesus took the idea of king and he broke it down to be about love in proximity, justice in real time, truth that troubles the powerful and centers the lives of the most impacted.

Jesus was a prophet in the lineage of his Jewish ancestors.

Jesus was a very present source of Divine Love, as evoked in the prayers of people from all cultures and ethnicities, of those pushed to the margins by greed and broken relationships. That's the kind of king we follow into the shadows of winter, into the stark learning we do in fallow times, into the vigilant waiting we must do as people of faith for the inbreaking of a new way, and a new day.

Jesus is showing us the way by asking us to see his face in our midst. He may be hard to recognize sometimes if we are stuck in keeping

ourselves comfortable. Even so, GCPC, we acknowledge that he is here inviting us to be transformed.

So, we step out of our comfort to meet Jesus again—learning to see the world differently, learning to let go of the ways of thinking and being that keep us stuck in unjust systems and structures, trusting the unfolding of things enough to follow the vitality that can only come from mutual liberation and true love.

Thanks be to God.