

THE SEASON OF ADVENT: 2020  
CHAPEL LANE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
EMBODYING THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A MATTHEW 25 CHURCH

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 those 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 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.

What word or phrase struck your eye/ear as you read/listened to this text?

What questions do you wish to ask Jesus/Matthew regarding this text?

What question do you hear God in the person of Jesus asking you?

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THE SEASON OF ADVENT: 2020  
CHAPEL LANE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
EMBODYING THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING A MATTHEW 25 CHURCH

During this past Summer, the Session of Chapel Lane voted to become a Matthew 25 Church, joining with congregations and Presbyteries and Synods within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in this initiative. The Matthew 25 initiative is an invitation to invest in deepening our discipleship in Jesus' name and committing to engaging God's mission in the world. It, like every initiative, provides a framework to be fleshed out in both theory and action. To be a Matthew 25 Church is to ask: How and Where do we experience Jesus?

The Matthew 25 vision contains three focuses: Building Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism, and Eradicating Systemic Poverty. To be a Matthew 25 Church means to be committed to pouring love, energy, and action into one or more of three focuses. These urgent tasks are a direct response to the Gospel of Jesus and a faithful expression of what it means to be Christ's disciples in this time and place.

Building Congregational Vitality is perhaps best thought of as the framework of this initiative, much as our skeleton is the framework of our bodies. With congregational vitality being both the drive and the outcome of engaging as a Matthew 25 Church within our community, we will be found faithful. Our community of faith's vitality is—like with all vital congregations—a measure of our spiritual strength and our capacity for purposeful mission as we seek to more faithfully become the Body of Christ in this time and place. Vitality means a recovery of the meaning of discipleship as we deepen our life in the Spirit.

This is the theme of this year's Advent and Christmas Study guide, the one you are reading, and will also provide the framework for the preaching during these seasons. Many scholars of Christianity believe we are in the early years of a new Reformation, a new reformation. One scholar breaks the history of the Church into thousand-year eras: God the Father, God the Son (the one we were raised in), and now God the Spirit. Others suggest that every five hundred years or so there is a new movement within the Christian faith that leads out of where we have been into a new era. Despite the differences in measuring the epochs, there is common agreement that all signs point to us having entered a new age.

Hallmarks of this new age include a stress on discipleship rather than church membership, and the understanding of the church primarily as a missional entity. Both are important, and are integrally related. A deepening appreciation of discipleship leads to a recovery of every Christian being a disciple of Jesus no matter what denominational affiliation is also claimed. And the body of Christ, which is each church, each congregation, exists to be a missional outpost in Jesus' name. No longer is mission something that is done "over there" or "by saints known as missionaries", it is how our faith is expressed in discipleship.

Vitality in individual disciples will have a direct influence on the vitality of congregations, of the communities of faith known as the Body of Christ. It is commonly understood that what this new Reformation replaces is a time known as Christendom, which is defined as the time when the case for Christ and the way of the world were found in concert rather than in contrast. Examples of these acting in concert to the benefit of the church would include no social or athletic activities (whether for adults or youth) sponsored on Sunday mornings, "Blue Laws" that closed some or certain businesses on Sundays, and the reading of a Bible passage as a part of each day's activities in public school classrooms. For the most part, Sundays are pretty much like every other day of the week as governments of all kinds have stopped protecting the Church. This is challenging for many of us, given how we grew up with it being the norm, and it is easy to blame society. God is inviting us to accept responsibility to be embraced by not only what is but what is yet to come.

Dismantling Structural Racism invites us into learning how racism is an inherent part of the life and history of our country from its earliest days. As a mostly white congregation, we have an opportunity to not only learn but to be transformed by learning how we are advantaged and others persons are disadvantaged by virtue of their skin color, ethnic identity or ancestral background. The Session has provided leadership regarding this subject through the adoption of an anti-racism statement:

"We, as the Body of Christ,  
standing in solidarity with our  
brothers and sisters of color:

Reject racism.

Promote tolerance.

Choose Love.

In our community.

In our country.

In our world."

Eradicating Systemic Poverty is, like the initiative in Dismantling Structural Racism, about challenging aspects of the systems we live in. Poverty means the lack of a sufficient income to meet basic needs for nourishment, clothing, shelter, health care and stable family life, and when it comes to children, having a long-term negative impact on the rest of their lives. Systemic poverty refers to the economic exploitation of people who are poor through laws, policies, practices, and systems that perpetuate their impoverished status.

What God is asking us to do, what God asks us to do in relationship to Matthew 25, is to pay attention, to practice our discipleship by joining with God in God's mission in the world. Please prayerfully use this Advent/Christmas guide and the worship guides during these seasons to explore with the Spirit's help God's guidance in our lives as disciples of Jesus.