



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 16, 2008

Morning Prayer
Matthew 25: 31-46
Rev. Donna Barr

The bumper sticker reads: “Jesus is coming. Look busy.” Not “Look holy,” or “Look good,” or “Look thin, blonde, and rich,” or “Look well-established” or “Look religious.” Just, “Look busy.” And assessing the Final Judgment laid down in today’s Gospel by Judge Jesus, the wisdom of this bumper sticker seems very profound, at least when you compare it with, “Honk if you love Jesus.” Matthew doesn’t use the word busy but he does present to us a theme which is best summarized as “watch” or “keep watch” His message today carries an active and productive meaning to “be awake to opportunity.” Awake to what? Awake to opportunity of the works of mercy. ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you: feed the hungry, give a cup of water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger into your home, give your coat to a cold homeless person, sit in the hospital or in a nursing home with someone who is sick, listen to them and pray for them, go to the prison and give love and hope to those who need forgiveness and care.

This looks plenty “busy” to me. Jesus is coming! I think this gospel reading is one of the most important biblical passages about how Christians are to live, but reading it again, I am struck not only by the call to action and deed, but how the righteous and the accused are both confused by the words of Jesus. “When,” they ask, “when did we see you hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or imprisoned?” Poverty, violence, and injustice so pervade our world that even the saints among us sometimes close their eyes, pass by on the other side, and fail to respond to the suffering around us. Do we even recognize our encounters with our God? And what does Jesus really look like? I asked myself this question and will share with you two stories that illustrate looking for Jesus.....watching.....paying attention.....and recognizing our Lord.

There is an old legend of Martin of Tours, the soldier saint. One cold winter day as he was entering a city a beggar asked him for alms. He had nothing to give him, but the beggar was blue with cold. Martin took the old soldier’s cloak he wore, cut it in two, and gave half to the beggar. That night, Martin had a dream. In it, he saw heaven and all the hosts and Jesus. Jesus was wearing the half of the soldier’s cloak. One of the angels asked, “Master, why are you wearing that old cloak?” And Jesus answered, “My servant Martin gave it to me.”

Mabel Shaw, a missionary to Africa, told this gospel story to the little Bantu children about giving a cup of water in the name of the Chief, as they had learned to call Jesus. In a hot country, a cup of water can be beyond price. Not long after she told the children this story, a string of porters came up the village road, obviously exhausted by the heat. These men were from the Tutsi tribe and there had been a history of hostility between the two. All of a sudden a parade of her little children with water pots on their heads approached these men. The children were a little apprehensive, but were determined to carry out what they had learned. They came up to the porters and knelt down holding up the water pots, saying, “We are the Chief’s children and we offer you a drink.” The astonished porters knelt in return, accepted and drank the water. The little children ran back to Mabel Shaw, saying, “We have given a thirsty man a drink in the name of the Chief.” In any other

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 16, 2008

circumstances, the porters would have been ignored, but Christianity bridged the gulf. The simple act of the Bantu babies did more to make Christianity real than any number of sermons.

Stories give us great insight into the person of Jesus but there is nothing like our own experiences, not only to see, but to touch and hug and dance and cry with Jesus ourselves.

And so..... when did I see you, Jesus?

I see Jesus living at 356 Maxwellton Ct. Lexington, Kentucky. This is a very special place where I served as Chaplain for three years....and this is the ministry at St. Agnes House. You have noticed how we pray for St. Agnes House every week in our prayers of the people. This 32 year old ministry of Hospitality in our Diocese is where I keep watch and stay awake encountering the living Christ. As I think about our ministry there and our guests who come, I can't help but see the image of our loving, merciful, and compassionate God.

Our guests come to Lexington for many kinds of medical treatments and find a home away from home at St. Agnes. I'd like to share with you a little about our community. Our guests arrive broken in body, mind and spirit. Many times they are afraid and uncertain about everything from their upcoming treatments, to their family they left behind, to the financial burdens they face. But this small community is safe in it's togetherness, shared meals, common concerns, and joyful celebrations. It is a community of the heart. It grows from the spiritual knowledge that we are alive not for ourselves but for one another. The guests, sooner than later, discover that they will survive, as we cease being individuals struggling alone with our pain, and become instead a community sharing our suffering in a great and holy act of compassion.

I'd like to share with you a wonderful letter from Sister Ester, the head of the order of St. Margaret.....the order that founded St. Agnes House. She wrote to the Cathedral and those who supported her, a little yearend report. She said, "This year we've taken care of the usual number of people, 58 patients and 43 caregivers, just topping our usual 100. They stay from 4 to 6 weeks so we cannot take in any more in a year. Also our limited bedrooms.....14 guests at a time, keeps the family feeling alive. I think that is one of the most important things in making our patients feel secure is the feeling of being in a family with a basic group. The group is small and so the people have a family feeling. Mass production would not accomplish what St. Agnes has done over the years. It's the presence of a warm caring and loving family and the patients themselves are wonderfully kind to one another. And the hominess of our rather tacky furniture – all donated by different people and nothing matching which makes it feel like home."

I see Jesus at St. Agnes House...hungry, thirsty, a stranger, away from home, sick, tired and lonely, and those who are in prison or are imprisoned by their displacement. There is an insightful quote that says "Every person I meet is a holy encounter. It has to be holy if Jesus is there! "When did we see you, Jesus?" "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."

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com