

The Return of the King [Matthew 25:31-46](#)

There is a rather famous author known as JRR Tolkein – maybe you’ve heard of him. He is famous from some little obscure books such as “The Hobbit” and “The Lord of the Rings”. I am a fan of “The Lord of the Rings” series. We follow the story of two little hobbits who take on the weight of the world as they try to overcome evil with good. But there is an underlying theme being played out as well. Aragon, heir to the throne of Gondor, has turned away from his destiny of serving as king, yet he finds himself being called back to take on the role he was destined to fill. Although good does overcome evil, the story is not complete when Frodo and Sam destroy the evil ring. The story is only complete when Aragon returns to Gondor as king. Throughout the epic tale, you can almost feel Aragon

being pulled toward the throne. I would like to play a part of the movie for you – this is the part where Aragon is crowned as king.

Today is Christ the King Sunday in the Christian calendar. You will notice we lit an additional candle today, and that our colors have changed from green to white to signify the coming of the light into the world. All of life on earth will be fulfilled with the return of the King. We celebrate that event today.

The gospels, as well as prophecies from the Old Testament and reflections from the epistles, are very much focused on Jesus and his time on earth. Today is the day when we look beyond Jesus' life on earth. We can see the completeness of God's plan with the return of Jesus as King.

Matthew 25:31 begins with, “When the Son of Man comes....” The scripture doesn’t say ‘if’ Jesus will return, it says ‘when’ Jesus returns. Jesus is returning – that fact is made clear. There are a lot of uncertainties in life, but this one thing we know for sure.

A couple of weeks ago we talked about Jesus as being the bridegroom and the church as the bride. In ancient Palestine, Jewish tradition concerning marriages was very different than what we are accustomed to today. The groom and the bride’s family would meet and discuss the union. Once a suitable agreement was made, the bride and groom were considered married. However, the groom would go away for a year to prepare a home for his bride. As the bride and groom were considered married; both remained celibate during their year apart. The bride continued to live with her family until the groom returned.

When the time was close for his return, maidens of the bride's village would stand watch. When they saw the bridegroom coming, they would alert the bride and her family. Everyone in the village would proceed to the new home of the bride and groom for a celebration lasting anywhere from three to seven days. It is assumed that this started the tradition of the groom's family paying for the reception, although that has changed as well.

In the parable, only five of the 10 maids were prepared for the return of the bridegroom. When the foolish maids tried to get into the wedding feast, they were told, "I do not know you." What was missing was a relationship with the groom – a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is an important point to make – we need to first have a relationship with Jesus Christ in order to be prepared for his return as King.

Last week's parable was the one about talents. A master went away for a long trip and put his servants in charge of his wealth. The servants were expected to risk their talents in order to increase the bounty to present to the master upon his return. We are told not to simply take our talents and squirrel them away. We are told to use our talents to further God's kingdom here on earth.

It's interesting how these two parable stories come just before today's scripture reading in Matthew. They definitely appear to be reminding us that Jesus – the bridegroom, the master, the king – is returning. We do not know when, but we are charged to be ready and not to be found asleep when we should be keeping watch. There is also a message of judgment. Those who were found to show kindness to others, those who fed the hungry, visited the sick, welcomed a stranger, saw to people's needs

without thought for payback or reward; they were the ones to be welcomed by Jesus upon his return. The sad note in this scripture lesson is the clear message that those who follow the ways of the world – those who can only see to their own needs, those who are only concerned for material gain in this life, those who have no time to feed the hungry or visit the sick; those are the ones who will not be welcomed by the king when he returns.

It is so easy to get caught up in this life that we may forget about all God's children. We are coming into the holiday season and for many in our community, this will be a difficult time. Many may have been so hurt by our failing economy, and the possibility exists that things will most likely get worse before they get better. I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to see so many of you already planning to help others this holiday season – those in our community

and those far removed from our community. At least 26 children will receive Christmas gifts this year that normally would not receive anything, thanks to those who put together shoe box gifts for Samaritan's Purse. We are already receiving donations also for Samaritan's Purse to help those in developing countries with the basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter. Plans are already in the works to help families in our community with both Thanksgiving and Christmas meals and gifts. Our neighbors will receive some holiday cheer in the form of Christmas baskets. We have no idea how someone may appreciate a basket and a visit during what can be a very lonely and painful time.

Someone recently said that it seems we have a lot going on now – it seems every weekend we are announcing more stuff! What has been the spark for this renewal? I

believe it is a reconnection with our faith. It is a renewing of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus has revived our strength, our joy, our eagerness to do his will. When we reaffirm our faith, we can see our natural progression toward doing good works. Once again, it is that blending of faith and works that is invigorating our congregation and it is a wonderful thing to behold. I can see it better from up here – sometimes it's good to be the pastor! I recently watched a video Sherri taped for me to help with my homework, and what struck me was how much folks were enjoying themselves. We were laughing through the announcements! We've been reminded that we come together to worship God, and that is a true celebration. We have a purpose and that is to serve God in all we do.

There's an old gospel tune with the words of the chorus, "The King is coming, the King is coming. I just

heard the trumpet sounding and now his face I see.” The King is returning. Jesus Christ will one day return to reclaim his people. Let us be watching and waiting for his return. Let us continue to care for our community in the way the God cares for us. Matthew 25:41 says, “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these...you did for me.’” Let us continually renew our faith so we are prepared for the Return of the King. Amen.