

Sermon Title: **“Upside Down?”**

Bible: **Matthew 25:31-46**

When: on Christ the King Sunday, November 26, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. Christ the King Sunday**

I hope that you had a wonderful Thanksgiving! Did you visit your family? Or friends? Or did you invite your family or friends? What did you eat? I visited my wife’s friend. We had turkey and ham. We ate a lot and we talked a lot. We had a lot of leftovers and shared a lot of memories and stories. We were stuffed with food and our friendship. I know that some of our church members were not feeling good last week. Many times, we forget to be thankful for our ordinary lives. But I am sure that it was a time to be thankful for our lives, our families, our friends, and doctors and nurses.

Today is called Christ the King Sunday. According to the church calendar, or the lectionary, today is the last Sunday of the liturgical calendar. And next Sunday we will start a new liturgical calendar with Advent and the Christmas season. The lectionary is our tradition. United Methodists have the Wesleyan quadrilateral, or four sources for our beliefs and practices. The four sources are Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. We respect our

traditions, and the church calendar and lectionary is one of our traditions. In my research, Christ the King Sunday is not that old. It was instituted in 1925 to fall on the last Sunday in October, and later it was moved to the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is right before Advent. The intention might be to conclude the liturgical Calendar with the theme of Christ the King. Jesus came as a baby, who was the most vulnerable form, but we confess that Jesus is Christ the King and our Lord. What image do you have about a king? What expectations do you have for a king? And I love today's scripture reading of Matthew from the lectionary on Christ the King Sunday!

## **2. Upside Down? The King and the Least?**

The king used to have absolute power. The king used to have everything. The king used to live separately in a palace. Perhaps the king might not care about anything that happened to ordinary people. But in today's passage, the King declared that the least was the same as the King. Could the King be the same as the least? The king could not be hungry, and could not be thirsty. The king could not be a stranger, since all honor and glory goes to the king. The king could not be naked, because the king needed to wear royal attire. The king could not be sick, because the health of the king was a matter that affected the whole nation. The king could not be in prison, because his place was the most high! But in today's passage, our King Jesus Christ regarded the least of our sisters and brothers as himself. The least was the most high, just like the King himself. It is upside down. In Matthew 25, the King emphasized that whether we took care of the least or not was the matter of salvation. Here, what the King was

looking for was not our faith, but our kind actions toward those in great need in our present world.

### **3. Upside Down? The Sheep and the Goats?**

What do we prefer, upward or downward? What does our society teach us and show us? Why do we want to make more money? Why do we want to have more education? To have a better position, to make and save more money, and to go upward is what we want and what we learn. So, for the goats, it was natural not to help others. They might not have any time or energy to help others in need. They might be busy in going upward higher and higher. They might think that they did not have any responsibility for those in need. They might think that those in need have to help themselves to go upward. That's because it is their fault if they are in need and their own responsibility to figure out how to get themselves upward. However, for the sheep, it was natural to help others. They might have some time and energy. Maybe they had been in a similar situation as those in need before. They might feel compassion or take some responsibility for others as a community.

In this broken world, to live like the goats might be more advantageous than to live like the sheep. Sometimes even taking care of ourselves can be challenging. Where is the time and energy to look at others and help them? But in the Kingdom of God, to live like the sheep is just natural. To help others is natural. To see Jesus' tears and smiles through others is natural. Then, what is upside down, this broken world or the kingdom of God? Then, who is upside

down, the goats or the sheep? And where do you live now, in the broken world or in the Kingdom of God?

#### **4. Advent Is Coming!**

Advent is coming soon! We can't wait for Advent and Christmas! Jesus came downward from Heaven to the earth, as the most vulnerable one, even though Jesus is God. God became a human being in order to be with us, to live with us, to suffer with us, and to save us. This is the love and grace of God. The water flows downward, not upward. It is to share the life of the water. This is the nature of God's Creation. It is natural for God's love and grace to flow over the earth and overflow through us. It is natural for the water to flow downward. It is natural to help others in need, or the least.

However, this does not mean that we need to be the least. We might need to go upward, but the reason why we need to go upward is to go downward or to help others. When we are up, we can go downward. When we are down, we cannot go downward. In order to serve, we might need to be upward. Do we want to go upward in order to stay there and to be served? To go upward and to be served is not our destination. To flow downward and to serve is our final destination.

Then, how can we go upward? What made us go upward? To inherit or to be able to make more money or to attain more education might be some of the ways, if it is not the final destination. What I would like to share is to receive Jesus Christ in you and in your life. We can read today's passage literally, and we can also read it in spirit. For example, the

Beatitudes in Matthew are a little different. In Matthew 5:3, it says “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” But in Luke, there is no mention of “in spirit.”

Perhaps, Matthew’s audience was made up of those who did not need to worry about absolute poverty or starvation. My grandparents had experienced the Korean War. The war destroyed everything and everyone. Starvation and survival were the real issues for them. But to me, starvation is not an issue any more. I know that I need not only physical food, but also emotional and spiritual food.

Have you been hungry and thirsty with spiritual or emotional needs? Have you been bullied before and felt like a stranger or like you were a nobody? Have you been ashamed of your mistakes or faults and felt like being exposed? Have you been mentally and spiritually broken, lost, and ill? Have you been stuck in fear, concerns, worries, or trauma, and felt like you were in a prison? At these moments, have you had anyone with you? Have you had any visitors come to you? Have you had anyone who wanted to help you? At those moments, I just wanted to escape from others, and I wanted to be alone. I did not want to have any visitors. I was not ready to have any. My outside looked okay. But my house in my mind, my spirit, was messy, dirty, smelly, and dark. I did not want to welcome anyone into my mind. But the Lord knocked on the door of my mind. I did not want to answer the knock. I thought that I could not welcome Jesus in my mind. How could I welcome the Lord into my mind? But the Lord Jesus Christ knocked on the door of my mind gently, politely, and patiently.

Finally, I greeted Jesus at the door, and I welcomed Jesus into my mind. It changed my soul and my life.

Advent is coming. And our Baby Jesus came. He was born in a manger in the stable, not the palace. That's because the stable might be the place where our worst lives. It is okay not to clean up your house. It is okay not to be the best of yourself. It is okay to welcome Jesus just as you are. Our Lord Jesus Christ wants to be with us, even when and where we are our worst. When Jesus knocks on your mind's door, I hope that you welcome Jesus into your soul and into your life. Where God exists is the kingdom of God and heaven. We live on the earth, but we experience heaven. I describe this as upside down, even though it is not the perfect expression. Heaven is on the earth here and now, and in our lives. Just like the sheep, we help others, as we see Jesus in them. We are blessed and we are the blessing for others. God's love and grace overflows through us. Let us continue our work and ministries for the kingdom of God!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, thank you so much for coming to us. We welcome you as our Lord and our King. We see your holy presence in our sisters, brothers, friends, and neighbors. Please use us for your Kingdom on the earth here and now. In Jesus' name. Amen.