

Sermon preached by The Rev. Robert L. Hart, Sunday of Christ the King, November 23, 2008  
Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24, Psalm 100, Ephesians 1: 15-23, Matthew 25: 31-46

+In the Name of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, who gives us the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation that we may be enlightened with all spiritual knowledge and hope. Amen.

Lots of us have a nickname. Bob is a nickname for Robert. Christ Church is actually a nick name, a popular nick name in the Episcopal Church --- Christ Church, Detroit; Christ Church, Grosse Pointe, Christ Church, Cranbrook; and Christ Church, Dearborn. That's just for starters.

If Christ Church is a nick name, what's our real name? I'm sure that in our papers of incorporation we're called Christ Church. However, if you go looking into the origins of things, you end up at Canterbury Cathedral in England. That magnificent mother church of Anglicanism was originally dedicated as the Cathedral Church of Our Lord and Savior, Christ, or something like that. Well, that's a mouth full. So, people gave it a nick name, Christ Church Cathedral. On this side of the pond, we named many of our parish churches Christ Church in honor of our English origins, and, obviously in honor of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The first time I ever worshipped here a number of years ago, I sat in the pew and tried to guess if there was a clue in the decoration of the church as to which among all the holy days that the prayer book calls feasts of our Lord Christ that this church claimed as a dedication or patronal feast. After looking at the windows and other adornments I decided that maybe the clue was in the mosaic behind the high altar. That beautiful icon looked to me to be Christ ascending into heaven. My best guess was that this parish celebrated its name day, feast of dedication, on the Feast of the Ascension.

That was just speculation, then I heard someone say it used to be so. In the 1970s the Episcopal Church added a Sunday of Christ the King, the Last Sunday after Pentecost. That's today. It makes for a perfect occasion to mark the dedication of this parish church and to renew our commitment to the mission of Christ, our King and Savior.

Christ Church, Detroit, may have been a suburban congregation on the edge of town in the late 1840s and 50s, but we soon became a downtown church. And the mission of this community of faith has been tied to the changing nature of the city and the metropolitan area ever since. Our dedication is to Christ, and our mission is to be a beacon of hope, the hope we find in Jesus Christ, in the midst of this great and troubled city and metro area.

You notice that when the nation looks at us it doesn't distinguish among the city and the suburbs. The headlines read "Detroit come to Washington." In the eyes of the nation we're all lumped together and linked to the fate of the auto industry. For those of us who live here and who believe in the mission of Christ and of Christ church, it's more complex than that. Yet, we do know that city or suburb it's all one thing. This is Detroit and we, Christ Church, have proclaimed ourselves a beacon of the hope we share in Christ our Redeemer, a light in the midst of a magnificent and distressed city.

The window above the high altar proclaims the message and the mission if you read the window not just with the light of the sun but through the light of today's gospel. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of glory." There Christ is before our eyes Sunday after Sunday seated in his glory surrounded angels. But message and the mission are not found in some earthly image of a monarch but in the message of the Shepherd King who speaks to us both in Ezekiel and in today's gospel.

Jesus understood the reign of God he preached in the light of the prophet Ezekiel. "I will feed them with good pasture." "I will seek the lost and the strayed." "I will bind up the injured." "I will strengthen the weak." "I will feed them with justice."

Jesus says this is the standard by which the King of Glory will judge. He is telling us we are held accountable by the nature of the mission of Christ. "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.”

This list is not exhaustive or even literal. It's suggestive. It allows us to enter into it and ponder where we fit in. Who is hungry and thirsty and for what? Do they need actual food or do they need a job? Are they hungry for meaning in their lives? Are they thirsty for friendship? Who is a stranger? Is it the latest immigrant or the homeless mentally ill? Is it the person seeking God? Who is it we are to welcome? Those of different background or sexual orientation? How do the words of Christ fit the mission of Christ Church?

We know we hunger and thirst for a relationship with God so we gather to worship, sing God's praises, feed on the Eucharist, go to Bible study, adult forum and see to it our children are fed in Sunday Church School. Beyond these necessary marks of a church where else is Christ calling us? What lies just outside our sight?

Two members of Christ Church have raised the possibility of starting an outreach and support group for people looking for work, have lost employment, are underemployed or in danger of losing a job. People sharing information, giving encouragement, joining in prayer and a meal sounds very gospel to me. Read about it in the forthcoming Chronicles.

I think people will need beauty, community and spiritual nourishment this Christmas season. Gifts are going to be scarce if sales at stores are any indication. Christ Church has a gift to offer. As I've said to many of you, it's one of this church's best kept secrets. Christmas worship here takes place in a spectacular building with music and liturgies that are stunning, worthy of the God we serve. They take us right to the heart of God and the message of the Christ Child. So, invite someone to the Christmas pageant and Eucharist or to the later service with all its customary glory.

These are two simple suggestions. You are the community of Christ. You are Christ's body, "the fullness of him who fills all in all." By being open to the guiding of the Spirit, you will see where Christ is calling this church. You will begin to hear the whisper of Christ's leading. And those words of Christ will take on new meaning. You'll come to the rector and to others and say, "I see this need. Why don't we try this?"

"Come you that 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." [...] "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."