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Proper 29 – ONE Sabbath / Christ the King  
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Matthew 25: 31-46

The person who wrote the gospel of Matthew was very concerned with judgment, with people who do the right thing and people who do the wrong thing.

Matthew's Jesus condemns people left and right for failing to recognize that the kingdom of God is right next to them:

in a wedding banquet,

in a vineyard,

in the loan of a large amount of money,

and in the poor, hungry, and imprisoned people in their midst.

I wince at all the gnashing of teeth, eternal punishment, fire, and darkness.

I look out at all of you and I want to tell you beautiful, comforting, loving things that Jesus said!

Some of you have a lot of gnashing of teeth in your lives already – how can I tell you that there is even more that Jesus expects of you?

Even in my own life, when do I have time to visit people in prison?

How do I feed the hungry? I toss clothes in the big bins in shopping mall parking lots, but is that the same as clothing the naked?

Welcoming the stranger, giving drink to the thirsty...

It sounds like another long list of things to add to my already long list.

But what if Matthew's Jesus is so tough,  
because this is how we meet Jesus: in the faces of people who are suffering.  
What if, without reaching out to them, we are actually living apart from Christ?  
What if we are making worse the darkness and gnashing of teeth already in our  
world, and perhaps even in our own lives,  
when we fail to pay attention to works of mercy and justice?  
We don't need to be sent away to hell, we can see it here on earth around us.  
And we can make a difference, no matter how small, in healing that pain and  
violence of the world.

That is what the ONE campaign is about.

They ask us, "What if you have the power to transform the futures and hopes of  
an entire generation in the poorest countries?"

By supporting Feed My Starving Children?

By purchasing a malaria net for \$12 through Episcopal Relief and Development  
to cover a family's bed and keep them from being bitten by disease-bearing  
mosquitos.

I think what some of you know, who have volunteered to pack food for Feed My  
Starving Children

is that it actually can bring great joy to reach out beyond our own lives to help  
people in need.

You take a few hours and pack food to send to kids in Angola or Haiti,

and suddenly, your life has been enriched, too.

And maybe you've never thought of it this way, but packing that food, making that connection with those children, even knowing you will never meet them, you have come closer to Jesus.

There are a lot of important and worthwhile spiritual practices out there.

They are important: prayer, beauty, fasting, hospitality...

But one of the most important ones is sharing ourselves with our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

One of the most powerful ways we can meet Jesus and give ourselves up to him is by working for justice among the least of our brothers and sisters.

There is a story in the ONE Sabbath materials about a Franciscan monk in Australia who was assigned to be the guide and "gofer" to Mother Teresa when she visited New South Wales. Thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this great woman, he dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about. But during her visit, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near her, the friar never had the opportunity to say one word to Mother Teresa. There were always other people for her to meet.

Finally, her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the Franciscan friar spoke to Mother Teresa: If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you? Mother

Teresa looked at him. "You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" she asked.

Yes, he replied eagerly. "Then give that money to the poor," she said. "You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you."

We *can* learn what life is about, what God is about, what Jesus is about, from Sunday worship, from a beautiful sunset, from a satisfying Thanksgiving meal, from the faces of our family members, but there is also something vital, something essential, about life, God, and Jesus Christ, that we can only learn when we reach out to the people in our world who are living in extreme poverty.

The kingdom of God is there. The face of Jesus Christ is there.

Amen.