

## **Matthew 25:31-46**

*Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are 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.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘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.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

Have you had the chance yet to meet Augie Pullman? Now, if the name doesn't ring a bell, I am pretty sure it will in the weeks to come.

Augie is the main character of the new movie that was just released called *Wonder*. Augie is a young boy who was born with a mutation of the TCOIF1 gene. It is a very rare gene defect which causes grave facial deformations. And because of that, his life has been a one surgery after another to try to construct a more normal appearing face, with the reality being that they will only be able to get so far in accomplishing that. Now, in the movie, Augie is going to “real school” for the first time in the fifth grade.

Well, as you would imagine, the first day was tough for the whole family. Mom, Dad, and sister all take Augie to drop him off. He exits the car with his NASA space helmet on, the same one that he wore many days to hide his appearance. Hugs are given, and love is shared. After mom gives her final hug, his teenaged sister comes up, and knowing the reality of peer

pressure and the importance at school of not being different, she whispers reassuringly into his ear, “You can’t blend in when you were born to stand out!” You know, that is a great line. You can’t blend in when you were *born to stand out*.

Right before Augie turns and walks towards the building and into the crowds of laughing kids gathered after a too-short, fun-filled summer break, his dad pulls him aside for a man-to-man talk. He tells Augie to listen carefully. He has two pieces of advice for him as he enters the unknown. First, with a serious look that gave away his hope to lighten the moment, he said, “Only raise your hand once per class, even if you know all the answers...Except for science,” he clarifies. “Go ahead and crush that one!”

The second piece of advice was more to the point. He lifts the visor of the helmet in order to look Augie straight in the eye, and says, “Son, you are going to feel like you are all alone, but you are not.” And with that his Dad removes the helmet from Augie’s head and Augie hesitantly marches off into a harsh world that will work hard to make fun of his difference.

Christ the King Sunday is the final Sunday of the liturgical year. Over the past twelve months we have been witnesses to something different. The virgin birth of Jesus, the coming of the Wisemen, the teachings of God’s way for the world and the living of God’s love in the world, forgiveness for all brought through death on a cross, eternal salvation realized from the empty tomb, and the birth of the church with its mission for all people. It is a Sunday when we recognize that we are different. That, ultimately, we were not meant to follow earthly Kings or Queens, but instead our heavenly King, as we live into who we are intended to be.

And on that road, we can never forget this important understanding. We can’t blend in when we were born to stand out. And when we feel like we are all alone, remember that we never are.

We are made to be different. We are made to be different from what much of the world demands, and being different can be tough. I wonder how many here, when you were a child and wanted to do something, or go somewhere, that your parents would not allow, used the age-old plea, “But, everyone else is doing it!” And I wonder whether the response that came back, without a second of hesitation was, “You are not everyone else.”

We are different. We follow a different King. We are not like everyone else. I suppose that we don’t like to hear that. It is not easy, and it is often not comfortable. It requires choices and discipline, and often being out of step with the choices and the disciplines of those around us that we want to blend in with. When the majority of people today sleep in on most or all Sunday mornings, we faithfully come to seek communion with the Almighty. When many say, in the words of Steven Stills of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, “when you are not with the one you love, love the one you’re with”, we hold to faithfulness and dedication as our standard. When the world seems to be taught that you should say whatever is necessary to get the power and wealth that you want, winning at all costs, we cling to the teaching that honesty and being

trustworthy is paramount, no matter what that brings or what we sacrifice. When many say that it is each person for themselves, we recognize that we are created to journey together, so we give of our time and treasure and talents so that others might be lifted out of their struggles.

We are different. We follow a different King. We were all made for a different world, a different type of world. And that differentness, as our world is being healed; that differentness, as Christ defines it, requires things of us.

As we embrace Advent this year, as we begin again our annual journey, we are going to take a look at what it means to be a follower of Christ as our king, as our Lord. I would like to invite you all to take the next step in the SHIFT journey that we began in Lent, as we learn about and come up with a rule of life for us here at Redeemer. A rule of life is how we intentionally, and outwardly, and authentically live out our lives as followers of Christ. It is designed not to be a legalistic list of works in order to earn us salvation points, but rather a realistic minimal standard for our spiritual journey below which we would not want to fall. It is something that we can reasonably expect to live by, with enough flexibility that recognizes each person's situation, while being clear enough so that we can ask others to help us maintain it.

A rule of life is important because we are different. And that differentness must be apparent to those around us. We attend church faithfully. We serve our neighbors joyfully. We pray unceasingly. We are not dishonest. We do not seek division. We love, even when love is not earned or returned.

We are not meant to blend in. We were born to stand out. We have been called to show a different way in a world that has become lost in its own way.

A rule of life helps us to always keep asking ourselves, "Who is it that we aspire to be? Who is it that we proclaim to follow? And who else would know any of that by the outward lives we live?"

At the end of the movie, *Wonder*, it is the school and the students that are changed. They have come to see a different way of being and have embraced it by embracing Augie. His difference was no longer reason for separation and division. It was a cause for celebration and for rejoicing. After an entire life of surgeries to try to change to be like the world, Augie and his difference was now changing it.

Christ the King Sunday says as much about us as it says about Christ. We are different. And, as we worship our King within that differentness, our King says to us, "You are not intended to blend in, because I have made you to stand out. There will be times when you will feel alone, but always remember that, as your King, I promise that you will never be. And together, by standing out, we will bring new life to the world.

Amen