

The beginning of a new year is a time to ask questions. What was 2017 like. Did I accomplish what I hope to accomplish. Did I hold my resolutions very far. How am I doing today. Well it wasn't my life like the life that I have now in the life that I want to have. And what does the year ahead look like. 2018. It's nearly a brand new slate. What will come. Certainly both challenges and opportunities that we don't yet know. It's a time for asking questions and questions are good not only at this time of year but also in all parts of our lives. Questions are to be encouraged both among our family members and friends in our congregation as we ask questions about our faith. And in our community when we ask are we going all together. What is God calling us to over the next four weeks.

We're going to take a closer look at some particular questions from God. You've heard them in this sermon start video questions from children and maybe questions that you've asked from time to time or even considered. My hope is that we are a place where questions are encouraged where they're welcomed and no matter how difficult they may be or how obscure they may seem. And that when you have questions or when others come to you for questions that we might have an environment where where these questions are welcome. And the.

Focus isn't so much on giving an answer. But it's on allowing the questions to be where they are to deeply engage with each other when we have questions serious questions about our faith. Then as we travel together we'll take some time over the weeks ahead to reflect on who we are. Who God has called us to be where God is calmness to go both as individuals and as a congregation. My hope in that bringing up some of these difficult questions and bringing them to the table and confronting them head on that we can create a brave face as a colleague calls. For deeper conversations to occur. Both among our family and friends. Among our congregation and in the wider community about a radio in Butler County.

In today's scripture lesson which is traditionally read at the beginning of the Church's Year in the new year on New Year's Day or more on the first Sunday of the year. It's a difficult question that's a difficult challenging teaching to consider as we begin the new year. In his vision the people of the Earth are standing there and the King is there at his final judgment and the judgment is determined based on their actions. The judgment they receive is based on how they cared for the poor and the needy of the world. The king declares that whoever cares for the least of these among us was in fact caring for the king himself.

The challenge that Jesus gives us in this teaching is to look at people not with our eyes but to look at them with the eyes of God.

I don't know about you but I find myself when I see someone that's different than me or or or it's easy to make assumptions about someone by the way they look on what they're wearing when I see them or what I see them doing but some of the questions that this passage raises is what do we really see when we look at the poor.

What do we make about them. When we see a man on a sidewalk outside the YMCA or the bench downtown can we see Jesus. When we look.

To those that need resources because they are been displaced from their home. Those living in refugee camps can we see ourselves in their faces. We send money to a congregation and halfway around the world can we see our children in the eyes of their children. Hear these words from Matthew 25 then

those who are righteous will reply to him lord why don't we see you hungry and feed your thirsty and give you a drink.

When we see you as a stranger and welcome you are naked and give you clothes to wear when we see you sick or in prison and visit you then the King will reply to them I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you have done it for me. You've done it for Jesus. You have done it for the king or. We haven't.

Done it.

This is admittedly a difficult passage of scripture and one that connects profoundly with the child's query. We heard just a few moments ago. Why is it that God chose to have Jesus born into a poor family. Recently I listen to a five part series from the radio show on the media. It was called Busted America's poverty myths. It's enlightening and challenging journey into a world of assumptions about the poor that too many of us take as truth. One takes listeners on a tour of a community in Appalachian Ohio. The host parses out some language that's commonly used to put people in certain categories. Which are then use to determine their worthiness or unworthiness for receiving assistance from the government or from others. The second week confronts the question of who deserves to be poor.

The program takes a deep dive into our history of assigning blame for people's impoverishment. Maybe you've heard these words before they're poor because they lack willpower. They're poor because they have no work ethic. They're poor because they failed them to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. All of these are myths and yet maybe you've heard them before. Maybe you've said some of them yourself.

The third week tackles a prominent presupposition held by many. Is there really equal opportunity in America.

Week four deals with the many in our communities especially children who seem to be falling through the cracks.

You're familiar with that here in Eldorado. Several years ago began a program to help make sure that children had enough food to eat during the summer. So many be reliant on the school lunches and breakfasts to be able to provide food for the day and kids didn't need to eat was formed out of a result of that and you've been a part of help making that happen every week every year sometimes especially children it seems fall through the cracks.

The final we provide some insight into the role that stereotyping plays in how we view people living in poverty. It also challenges many of the assumptions we make about the reasons why people cannot seem to climb out of poverty. Poverty no matter how hard they try.

Now I share this with you not only because I think it's a program worthy of your listening time but because it helps us point squarely at some of the issues that keep us from unable to act in a way that Kreiss is calling us to act to help our neighbors in need. The language and labels that we use to talk about people about class about gender about race and education about income levels in the United States in Butler County right here in Eldorado. They can limit not only our compassion.

But also our willingness to confront the questions we need to address. As communities of faith.

Some of that have been going on here in Eldorado in Butler County over the last several months as is called Thrive Butler program is designed to help people move out of generational poverty not just address their needs to basic needs but to come up to the question is Well why is it that they find themselves in need in the first place.

One part of the way that we do this has a corrugations the busing box it's helping care for our immediate needs but also the deeper question is why people find themselves in poverty. To begin with three Butler and others are working to make a difference in our community. And this scripture brings it up for us here at the beginning of the year.

This teaching from the end of Matthew this is part of his last public address before Jesus was crucified. He has a few final things to say to those that are follow me after him publicly into core teaching for Christians which is part of the reason why we're reading it here at the beginning of the year. It reminds us in the starkest possible terms of one of the key messages that Jesus brought to the world those whom this world considers insignificant are very significant to God.

Those whom this world considers insignificant are very significant to God. Now let's be honest this is a.

Message that challenging for many of us it comes against the grain of everything that we seem to be taught about what constitutes success in this life. It challenges the so-called American dream it slashes away at our love affair with capitalism our belief of survival of the fittest. It removes any illusion that we can ignore our responsibility to care for the poor and the sick of the world. In the video the child asked why was Jesus born into a poor family.

And a response that calls us into deep deeper conversation is that God doesn't see the world in the same way that we do. Jesus came not to fulfill our expectations but to turn our expectations upside down.

Not to condone the world as it is but to point out what might be in the world and help us see how we might live and grow into it.

But Jesus doesn't just make this about God. He makes it about us. The judgment of the king is based on our behavior.

Several chapters earlier in the book of Matthew. Jesus says to each one of us you are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness how will it become salty again. It's good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can be hidden.

What Jesus is talking about is that God is called each one of us to see God's people and to care for them. We are the people whom God is called to offer love and mercy and grace to whoever is hungry or homeless or Raggatt or refugee or otherwise not considered important in terms of the values of this world.

The essential message of Jesus is that in God's kingdom every person is significant. Every single person. In God's kingdom.

All are welcome to the table in God's kingdom Jesus is just as likely to be born to a poor pregnant unmarried teenage girl as he is to a wealthy socialite in God's kingdom. Money and Power matter much less than they do in the world the kingdom and God's kingdom there's no longer Jew or Greek slave or free woman or man because all are one. In Jesus Christ.

But there is a second and perhaps even more important message in this teaching. It's a message for each one of us from Jesus. As a message we would do well to take heart as we begin this new year not only are we to view all of the people of the world as God's beloved children we need to understand that each one of us.

Is a beloved child of God. You and you you.

You.

The good news is that each human being each man and woman and child no matter where they are where they've come from. No matter what they've done or whatever they've not done how rich or poor and how valued by the world or dismissed by it. Each one is significant to God.

So at the beginning of this new year know that you are significant to God. You matter to this world. Your sins are forgiven. And you are loved.

By God. And because you are a child of God you are important you are important and your presence matters your witness matters your life matters. You are the very ones who give the world the heart to go on to make a difference to change the world in the name of the one who came to give his life for us. We pray with me.

God to give you thanks for your presence with us. We ask that you would open our eyes. To see the poor. Around us. We ask you to open our hearts. To make a difference to take action. To share your love. And your life. Oh God we pray all these things in Jesus name Amen.