

Sunday, November 20, 2011: Matthew 25:31-46

by [Christine Chakoian](#) in the [November 15, 2011](#) issue

I'm not a big fan of reality TV, yet I'm drawn to one reality show: *Undercover Boss*. CBS describes the nature of the show:

Each week, *Undercover Boss* follows a different executive as they leave the comfort of their corner office for an undercover mission to examine the inner workings of their companies. While working alongside their employees, they see the effects that their decisions have on others, where the problems lie within their organizations, and get an up-close look at both the good and the bad while discovering the unsung heroes who make their companies run.

To the utter surprise of the employees, the CEO reveals his or her true identity at the end of the show and then shares observations.

It sounds a lot like the gospel text for Christ the King Sunday. "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." Then, to everyone's surprise, he will reveal that he has been undercover among them for some time, observing them at work.

Yikes! I wonder how Jesus would judge his company at work right now. *Corporation*, after all, comes from the same Latin root as *corpus*, as in the body of Christ.

- How well do we as the community of Christ understand our corporation's incentive structure? "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."
- How willing are we to go the extra mile when customer demand exceeds supply? "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."
- How are we doing with the company's ethics statement? "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."
- How clear are we about the guidelines for promotion? "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."
- How well do we grasp the company's creed? "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . [and] your neighbor as yourself."

- How well are we fulfilling the CEO's mission? "Go therefore and make disciples."
- How accurately are we anticipating the CEO's priorities? "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."

For most of my life I have read this passage as a warning about my personal behavior and charity. If I behave generously toward the poor and kindly toward those in need, then I will reap my reward; I will be promoted to heaven. If I blow it, at some performance review I can expect to receive the demotion I deserve.

Personal responsibility and consequences are part of this passage, but the real concern is whether the mission of Christ's corporation—Christ's corpus—is being accomplished through us, his employees. If his staff is not getting it right, we will damage the company's reputation, undercut its values, sabotage its mission and perhaps even threaten its viability.

But if we are pleasing our boss, we will create demand for his product—requiring him to hire more and more laborers. It doesn't matter whether they receive the same wages we do even if they're hired at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20:1ff.). There's always room for "unsung heroes who make the company run."

The metaphor is not perfect. I doubt that the primary purpose of the incarnation was for our cosmic Boss to see how the company was running or to experience firsthand the challenges facing the field workers. But it humbles me to know that Christ cared so much that he left the comfort of the corner office to come down and hang around his staff. I am encouraged that Christ knows our frustration with working alongside those who don't carry their weight or are consistently annoying. I am strengthened because he rolled up his sleeves in the muck of the factory and field, the hospital and kitchen, the halls of power and the temple of worship. I am reassured that he has compassion for those of us who, out of exhaustion or discouragement, are tempted to cut corners or even walk away.

Christ the King Sunday finds us at the end of another church year. We are gearing up for next year's budget, counting stewardship pledges and planning Advent and Christmas. Many of us are discouraged by the unfinished business on our desks; we wonder if we're hurling ourselves at work that matters. Meanwhile the secular calendar also presses toward year's end: church members eye their businesses'

bottom lines, gauge end-of-year income and liabilities and wonder whether they'll get raises or even have a job in the new year.

When we feel defeated from fighting inconsequential battles or at the mercy of a seemingly capricious invisible hand and inadequate against the press of time and need, we can remember the episode when our boss sacrificed everything to ensure the corporate mission was fulfilled: "[He] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but . . . humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). That's the bottom line that really matters.