THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from Region 6

ELCA

Christ the King, Lectionary 34, Year A

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Gospel Text – Matthew 25:31:46

Matthew 25:31-46

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 31 "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. 32 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, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and
the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you
who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the
foundation of the world, 35 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, 36 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.' 37 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?
38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave
you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'
40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least
of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at
his left hand, 'You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared
for the devil and his angels, 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty
and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 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.'

[44] 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?' [45] 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.' [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life."

SERMON TEXT:

Friends, I put together and recorded this sermon prior to the midterm elections…

By the time you hear these words, we will be a few weeks beyond going to the polls…

And it is my hope that when this finds you…the world will feel less divided than it has been…

But my sense is that it will not.

And that this gospel lesson we've heard proclaimed this morning from the 25th chapter of Matthew…about Jesus…the Son of Man dividing people one from another…into those who are sheep and those who are goats…it's my sense that this gospel lesson MIGHT…at the onset anyway…feel a little exhausting…

Especially if you…like me…are simply TIRED of the ways in which we…collectively and individually…as we expend so much of our time, money, and energy separating ourselves out from one another on our own…

Drawing lines between us…and them…

Spreading ourselves so thin across so many issues… that there just doesn't feel like there is much of us left… collectively or individually…

I just don't have much bandwidth anymore for concerning myself with who is in and who is out…

…so I have to admit that, at first glance, I find Christ's words this morning about who is a sheep and who is a goat…to be a little draining…

I'm simply tired of all the division…

…and I want so desperately for all people to REMEMBER that we belong to each other…

…I want us to REMEMBER that across all the lines we have drawn to separate ourselves…across all strata of things like politics… religion… race… culture… citizenship… economics… figurative and literal borders… that we…all humans everywhere… are a people that FLOURISHES when we live into LOVING each other…when we live into making each other's interests…our own interests…

Think about what we have accomplished as a species…together…

Technology, medicine, education, agriculture, architecture, energy, communications, air travel, space travel….

Our system of roads alone…on the whole…is a beautiful representation of our ability to kind of harmonize with each other…enough to move relatively safely from here to there…sometimes at fairly high speeds… simply because we all agree to behave within the parameters of some painted lines, some posted signs…and a few agreed upon rules.

Surely there is more for us than division and separation…if we can just reclaim what it means to see and care deeply for one another…right?

Surely there is something that lives deep within us…that yearns for something more than the realities of this broken world and our broken behaviors…isn't there?

As I said…at the onset…at first glance… this morning's gospel lesson from Matthew 25… Jesus' words about separating people one from another into sheep and goats…MIGHT feel a little exhausting…

But I want to invite you this morning…to set the stuff about separation of PEOPLE aside…

…I want to invite you this morning to ignore the instinct to try to be a member of the "in" group…

…I want to invite you this morning to put down the fear that might creep in when you hear about the eternal punishment that waits for the goats….

And instead of a message of troubling separation… I want you to do your best to hear a message of challenging invitation…

…A challenging invitation to embrace the ways of Jesus over the ways of the world.

…A challenging invitation to orient our lives TOWARD Christ by orienting our lives TOWARD each other.

Sure…we hear Christ's words this morning creating two groups. People who will be put at his right hand and inherit the kingdom…and people who will be put at his left who will go away into eternal punishment…

But Jesus doesn't leave it at that…he doesn't just explain that there are two groups…and some are in and some are out and that's that…

No…

Jesus then takes the time to specifically illustrate the qualities and values that demonstrate his qualities and values…and the qualities and values of his kingdom…a kingdom…a way of life…that Jesus says has been a part of God's plan since the very foundation of the world itself.

Jesus explicitly states these qualities and values…as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned.

Jesus says that when we live into these qualities and values…we are not only nourishing, welcoming, clothing, caring for, and visiting the most vulnerable in our midst…but that we are also nourishing, welcoming, clothing, caring for, and visiting HIM.

Jesus is unequivocally telling us that seeing and caring deeply FOR EACH OTHER…is THE WAY we demonstrate that we see and care deeply FOR HIM.

And this is not new for Jesus…who REPEATEDLY points us at our call to love God AND neighbor…AND even enemy…

…with the same love, forgiveness, and sacrifice we find at the foot of the cross.

This is most certainly BEAUTIFUL and GOOD news…

And it is a REMINDER…from Jesus himself…that we do, in fact, BELONG to each other…

…AND…it can be a little indicting…because we know…WE KNOW we fall short of this REGULARLY…

We know…that if this gospel lesson from Matthew 25 this morning was ONLY about separation of people…one from another…into sheep and goats…

…we know…we might very well be goats…

…Because we know that we have let ourselves get distracted by and caught up in the madness of this world…rather than listening to Christ…rather than heeding the voice of the Holy Spirit…

…rather than simply loving our neighbors as ourselves…

And if anything…Christ's words to us about sheep and goats this morning…is an attempt to shake us loose from the captivity we find ourselves in…the captivity of this divided world…the captivity of our sin…the captivity of the lies we've told ourselves…

…that we can consider ourselves greater than…more important than…more chosen than other people…

And friends…as people of faith…that is simply not an option for us.

As people of faith…we are called to do more than declare that faith…but to live it…

Not as a requirement…but as a natural response…as the ONLY REASONABLE response to having received the gift of love, forgiveness, and new life Christ promises us.

As Lutherans…we believe there is NOTHING we can do to earn that love, forgiveness, and new life…

And I suppose that means we believe we don't HAVE to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, or visit those imprisoned…

But why WOULDN'T we?

Why wouldn't our faith NATURALLY turn into these responses?

The writer of the book of James asks the question this way:

"Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, [16] and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?"

The writer of James continues, "You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. [20] How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?"

As Lutherans, we are indeed a people that lean hard into the truth that we are saved BY GRACE, through faith…

…but friends…faith is not just an idea…it's not just a routine… it is a way of living and being…

And this morning…Jesus is inviting us into a way of living and being that demonstrates his qualities and values…in the way in which we live and exist with each other.

In the way in which we share these qualities and values with the least of us.

Jesus isn't trying to separate us this morning… he's trying to cut through the ways we defy and disobey and deceive ourselves… so that we might truly COME TOGETHER…so that each of us and all of us might not just inherit the kingdom…but experience it in real time in the here and now…

So that we might come to live fully into what it means to love Jesus… by loving each other…

So let's do THAT…

…even if and especially when the world would try to convince us otherwise…

Love the least…love everybody…meaningfully…sacrificially…tangibly…

It is the way of Christ's kingdom…and always has been…and always will be.

Amen.

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