

## Christ the King Sunday

*Matt. 25:31-46* 31 “But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. 34 Then the King will say to those on the right, ‘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 fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. 36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’ 37 “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? 39 When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ 40 And the King will tell them, ‘I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ 41 “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his demons! 42 For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me anything to drink. 43 I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me no clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ 44 “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ 45 And he will answer, ‘I assure you, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ 46 And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”

The sheep respond to the words of the King in surprise. They weren’t aware of how they impacted life. They didn’t always see the harvest, the end result, or the difference they made.

The goats respond with a similar surprise assuming that they were basically good people. When did they see Christ? They imply that they never saw Him. But they go away into eternal punishment because of their callousness and insensitivity. What might they have talked about as they made their way to eternal punishment? Let’s listen in.

(1=Pastor)

1: The nerve of that deity to judge us.

2: You've got that right. I've always been of the persuasion that people in need can learn to take care of themselves.

1: Right! And people in prison belong where they are...out of the society whose laws they broke.

2: Some of them need to have the key thrown away after they've been locked up.

1: And the sick? What is that so-called God expect us to do? All become doctors and nurses? That's their job and there are a lot of good doctors and nurses.

2: Did you catch that bit about inviting strangers into my home? My mother read me the book when I was growing up and I read the same one to my kids and grand kids: never trust a stranger. If they can get involved and demonstrate they are worthy of our friendship and trust, then I'm all for it.

1: What about clothing the naked?

2: He got that all wrong. I gave my used clothes to the Goodwill and Salvation Army. Very seldom did I sell them in a garage sale.

1: I think He was expecting us to put the clothes on them.

2: You mean like those naked starving people in Africa or India? No way

1: Well, we've been sent into eternal punishment.

2: I'm not in pain except oddly enough it feels hotter than it did a while ago.

1: There are no 'whiles' in eternity. But you know what the joke says?

2: No what?

1: Go to hell and get to be with all your friends.

2: Ha ha ha. That's a good one and probably half right. I didn't hang around with people after church. I just took off and got home before someone asked me to help serve on some committee or sing in the choir.

1: Well, I never went to church. I was touched one time when I heard the atheist author, Anne Rice, became a practicing Catholic again. It must have been Hurricane Katrina that did that.

2: Maybe.

1: I liked her gory death and vampire stuff. Now, she is writing about Jesus. The conservative right will be buying up her book, I guess.

2: Hey look over there in the group of us hiking. It looks like a local preacher.

1: And that's a high official. He was a really good guy. He did all sorts of things for our community and helped out those evacuees.

2: I wonder if the Big Guy upstairs didn't make a mistake.

1: God is perfect, didn't you hear?

2: Well at least I won't have to hear the preacher from our church laying a guilt trip on me.

1: I never put up with that stuff. Sundays I slept in, read the paper, watched DVDs, had brunch. It was truly a break from the work I hated.

2: Speaking of work, what did you do?

1: I was a manager for the Super Store

2: That's neat. I was a secretary for a bank manager. Man, it's getting hot and I am hearing what sounds like screams.

1: It's your imagination. You know there is no such thing as hell.

2: Hell is what you make it. I figure God doesn't really care about people like us or we wouldn't landed here.

1: He didn't care about all the innocents in the 9-11 towers or the hurricane or tornado victims, not to mention the earthquakes and the Tsunamis.

2: I think he could have done a better job of running the world.

1: Right, maybe we could hike back and tell him that he should have clothed the naked, and fed the hungry and visited the sick and imprisoned and lonely. What do you say?

2: OK, but I can't go up the hill; it's too steep.

1: We're falling.

2: And it's hot.

1: Faster and faster

2: And there's my hairdresser over there. What's she doing here? She sang in the choir.

1: I can't stand the fire.

2: I guess we are cursed.

1: Sadly so, sadly so

The criteria Christ will use to judge people is loving a neighbor in need. We know the great commandment to love God first and neighbor as self.

In James 2, he says: *10 And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws. 11 For the same God who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." So, if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery. 12 So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law*

*that set you free. 13 For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.* This text is about being merciful even when it is outside of our comfort zone.

Do people usually determine whether they will be nice to somebody only if they can get something back? What can the naked, hungry or prisoner give back?

Think for just a moment: How would our behavior change if we treated each person in our lives as if they were Jesus? They are all image bearers of the Lord who made us.

This event is the Last Judgment. Let's look at the six actions Jesus will use as a basis of judgment. Are they not all acts of love? *35 For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. 36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.* In which of these six areas do you find yourself serving most naturally? In which, do you have the most trouble? Is there one you'd like to get involved with? Pray about it for the Spirit's guidance.

Last Sunday's Gospel taught us about Christian responsibility with our resources and talents. Today's is about how we have lived up to the great commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself. James 2 says: *15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17 So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.* 1 John 3 adds: *17 But if anyone has enough money to live well, and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person?* John finishes his letter in chapter 4 saying: *20 If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? 21 And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too.*

It is good to be able to have understanding from when you have been hungry or thirsty, a stranger or in need of clothes, when you were sick or imprisoned and someone reached out to you. It can help us stand with the person who has a similar need. What does this text call us to then, but true faith active in love? Amen