

Pastor Gail Duba
Christ the King Sunday

The Sheep and the Goats

Nov. 22, 2020
Matt. 25:31-46

Today is Christ the King Sunday, one of the newer church observances. The last Sunday after Pentecost, before we launch into the new church year and Advent, & on this last Sunday of the church year, we celebrate Christ as King of our lives. There is something grand and glorious about this festival. We spend a lot of time talking about Jesus as meek and humble through the church year, but today unashamed we see our Savior as our King. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne" (Matthew 25:31).

Now let's look at what our text says about sitting on the throne of judgement. Like it or not, judgment is a fact of life. That is true whether we are talking about the histories of nations or the events of our own personal life. If we break the law, then society will judge us. If we live immorally, drink too much, or live a lifestyle of constant stress--then our bodies will judge us. We simply cannot escape judgment in life. Jesus rarely spoke about the final judgment, but on this occasion he did paint a picture for us in one of his parables. A shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, said Jesus, so too shall there be a great division on the final day. Those on the right hand will be allowed entrance into the kingdom, while those on the left will be denied it. And the great surprise is that those who thought they were religious turn out to be not as good as they thought, and those who thought they failed were told they did a better job than they supposed. I would like to suggest three points that this parable we are looking at this morning.

First, the parable suggests that we are to view each individual as though he or she was Christ himself. "Lord, when did we feed you, or clothe you, or visit you in prison?" was the question that was asked. Came the response: "When you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me."

There is an old children's story. The Knight's aide advised the mayor of a small village that his majesty was going to be making a visit to their humble little village. With great fanfare the mayor began to make the appropriate arrangements. On the day of the arrival the mayor, dressed in his finery, waited in joyful anticipation. The hours slowly ticked away but no one ventured into the village. No one, that is, except a lonely lame beggar who asked the mayor for a drink to quince his thirst. Irritatingly he brushed him aside. He had no time for beggars such as this, for he was waiting for the King. Yet, at the end of the day the mayor stood alone; the King had never arrived. Furiously he wrote the King's aide asking what had gone wrong, only to be told that the King had indeed passed through his village that day. The aide said, "He was traveling incognito." He had come in the disguise of a lonely lame beggar.

Who is Christ? Christ is in every person. There will be those who say, "But master if we had only known that it was you we would have responded." That is precisely the point. If the Bethlehem innkeeper had known that Mary was carrying within her womb the long awaited Messiah, no doubt he would have made room for them on that fateful night. If the Sanhedrin had known that it was God they were arresting on that fateful night in the Gethsemane garden, no doubt they would have followed him. Our goodness must be uncalculating. If we do a kind act simply because we think that it will assist us in gaining entrance into heaven, then our motivation was not love but selfishness.

Secondly, the parable suggests that in the end the criteria by which we shall all be judged will be simple acts of kindness. In the story the King allows entrance into his kingdom not by affiliation with any particular religious group, or fame, or fortune, or credential that might be listed in an obituary. No, the final judgment is based upon how kind an individual was: feeding those who were hungry, showing concern for those in prison, taking care of those who did not have sufficient clothing.

Who would ever have thought that such simple acts would carry so much weight on the final day? Who would ever believe that a man would be judged for what we view as slight oversights? When we think of divine judgment we think of a few life-making decisions, but according to this story judgment comes every single day in the little commonplace things that we do or we do not do. Piety, orthodoxy, sound theologies do not count for all that much. Jesus is saying that the main business that we are in is the business of kindness, and it is this criterion by which God will view our life. Ignore the law of kindness and we perish.

I always remember fondly the movie Sound of Music. At the beginning we find Baron Van Trapp ruling his household with an iron fist. Every time he blows a shrill whistle the children come marching out of their bedrooms like well-seasoned troops. He then turns to Maria, the new governess, and curtly informs her that her signal on the whistle will indicate thus and such. She very quickly informs him that she does not answer to whistles. She introduces a new mood and slowly the children begin to respond to her and the house is transformed from a military barracks into a home. Of course, you cannot miss the point. It is kindness that has won the day.

Of course, there is a drawback in kindness. Kindness means nurturing and nurturing takes time. Blowing a whistle will get you a more immediate result. But in the end shouting and ultimatums will never win the day. The Apostle Paul admonished the church at Ephesus: "Stop being mean, bad tempered and angry. Instead, be ye kind to one another, even as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ Jesus."

Third, this parable suggests that in the end we are judged not on the bad that we do, but the good that we do not do. Those on the left hand of the King were denied entrance into the Kingdom. Why? Because he said, I was thirsty and you gave me no water, I was in prison & you never came to see me, I was without clothes & you never gave me any. We think of divine judgment as the opposite of this. We think that the thing that will get us into heaven is by refraining from certain sins. That misses the point. Jesus told the story about a man who took a talent & buried it. Why did Jesus condemn him? Not because he gambled it away, not because he frivolously spent it, but because he did nothing with it. Those on the left hand side were kept out of the Kingdom of God, not because of what they did but because of what they failed to do. In the old catholic language, It was not sins of commission, but sins of omission.

I like the story behind a man named Henry Dunant. He was born to wealthy parents in Switzerland in 1828. A deeply compassionate man, he devoted considerable time assisting and encouraging young people, especially the poor. At about eighteen years of age, he founded a Young Men's Christian Union. In 1859, at the age of 30, Dunant was traveling in northern Italy. He had only one goal which was to get the support of the Emperor of France for a business project in Algeria. But the Emperor, Napoleon III, was busy driving the Austrians out of Northern Italy.

Arriving on the day of the Battle of Solferino, Dunant could not believe what he saw. That day the French victory over the Austrians left 40,000 dead, dying and wounded scattered over a bloody terrain. Dunant never did see the Emperor but what he did see changed him & the world forever. He joined in the work of relief, sent his horse drawn coach to bring supplies, & wrote to his friends in Switzerland for aid. He labored for 3 days at this horrible task. Then he returned home and he began writing. He made an appeal against the terrifying inhumanity he had witnessed. He hoped he could influence people to prevent or to reduce the suffering of soldiers. The result of his writings was a book: *A Memory of Solferino*, printed in Geneva in October 1862. This famous book, mailed by the author to influential people throughout Europe, excited them beyond all expectation. In the last chapter of his book he made some proposals on make-shift hospitals, trained volunteers, & the need for international cooperation. Finally, 5 years later, at the Geneva Convention of 1864 16 nations signed accords-modeled on Dunant's proposals, acknowledging the neutrality of medical personnel in times of hostility. For their banner and symbol they chose a white flag with a red cross. And so the Red Cross was born!

We need to look upon each person as though he or she was Christ. Kindness is the criteria by which we will be judged. It is not the bad that we do that will keep us out of

heaven (we have been forgiven for our sin deeds); rather, it is the good we fail to do that
that will make us a sheep or a goat. Amen.