

To the Least of These

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

November 25-26, 2023 Christ the King Sunday

Year A: Matthew 25:31-46

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>31</sup>“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. <sup>32</sup>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, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>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, <sup>36</sup>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.’ <sup>37</sup>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? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>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.’ <sup>44</sup>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?’ <sup>45</sup>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.’ <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

*In this parable, Jesus is passing judgment on the Gentiles. Still, here is a word for our daily walk and living with Jesus as our Lord and King. In vulnerability, we learn to love one another with God’s help and in Jesus’ name. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.*

On this Christ the King Sunday, may His Lordship rule and reign in our hearts today and always. Amen.

The last three weekends, we've been working our way through Matthew, Chapter 25. Jesus' teaching about the sheep and the goats is the last apocalyptic parable in the chapter. He is teaching about the end times; which neither Jesus nor we know when will come.

In this particular parable, the Son of Man is there with all his angels, sitting on the throne of glory. Matthew notes that the 'nations' are there. 'Nations' in this context are not Jewish people or Jewish Christians. Rather the people of the 'nations' are the Gentiles. Those outside the community of faith. The parable then speaks to how the Gentiles, will treat the Jewish and Christian communities when those communities come under persecution. Which is why Jesus says, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these *who are members of my family* you did it to me.'

Now we are Gentiles, since we were grafted in Jesus' tree of Life as non-Jews. But because none of us are non-believers, we'll look instead to the ethic Jesus offers here. *Here is a word for our daily walk and living with Jesus as our Lord and King. In vulnerability, we learn to love one another with God's help and in Jesus' name.*

What is fascinating about this text is that neither the sheep nor the goats knew they either did or didn't minister to Jesus in His time of need. They simply acted; taking food, water, clothing to those in their time of need. These didn't think about their actions in light of doing it for God. Or they didn't act at all, yet thought they were living for God.

Each group asks the same question: When was it that we saw you and took care of you? When was it that we saw you and didn't take care of you? For both groups, clearly their actions didn't connect with their thinking and ethic of love.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King. Following Jesus, as our Lord, is a daily decision brought about by the Spirit's movement within. It's getting up and making a commitment to act with God's patience, love and kindness. We make it our intention to take up Jesus' cross, and follow Him day by day, sometimes hour by hour as the situation dictates.

Jesus says He will separate the sheep from the goats, those who act in accordance with God's will and those who don't. Jesus certainly understands what He is asking. For He, Himself, has lived as one of the least and last. Jesus knew the importance of a cup of cold water from Jacob's well. He understood the gratitude

of receiving a meal from a stranger...the warmth of that generosity. Pure, gracious love needs no explaining. It's only requirement...to be received.

Take a look at this picture of God's pure, gracious love. (Video of two pre-school boys hugging) Not thinking, not judging, only acting with their hearts.

A video showing two little boys running and hugging each other on a New York City street has gone viral. Michael Cisneros, one of the toddlers' father, shared the heart-melting footage (in 2019) after seeing the kids erupt in joy. Cisneros posted the clip showing the children sprint toward one another, arms outstretched and smiling, after being apart for just a few days. "It's Thursday," he wrote on [Instagram](#). "These two haven't seen each other since Tuesday. So many feels, it's beautiful. So thankful."

The 2-year-olds, Maxwell and Finnegan, live a block apart in Washington Heights, [CBS New York reports](#). The two have been best friends for about a year and just started riding the bus together to day care since they live in the same neighborhood. "Their friendship is a beacon of hope."

What we can learn from children, yes? We know that right now many people succumb to acting without thinking. Just doing whatever feels right. In that mindset, it's easy to lapse into binary thinking. "You're a sheep. I'm a goat. I don't like sheep. You don't like goats. We'll just stay away from each other, because it would be too much work to try and love you."

At our worst, we allow binary, on/off, light/dark, black and white thinking to guide our lives. Jesus asks for more. But loving like those two little boys, when we get to be adults, dictates, vulnerability. Courage.

Jesus asks us to reach out in vulnerability to love with God's love. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Give a cup of cold water to the thirsty. Jesus asks us to connect our thinking, our faith, with our actions...have them be in alignment.

Do you remember these? After God's work our Hands day, we had 170 of these care kits for homeless people. Some of you have been taking them. And I'd guess there are still about 150 left. They aren't doing any good in our closets. Socks to clothe the cold feet. Water for the thirsty. Crackers for the hungry. They are here for your taking. *"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me."*

This coming Friday, we begin housing four guests in their four cars on our property. We are looking for volunteers to buy sheets, make a meal or share dinner conversation with our guests. *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.”*

I know for we adults who are used to living in our heads, and might have our protective guards up, this feels vulnerable. I understand and I’m not asking you to do anything dangerous. And...we followers of Christ hear His words of loving command. *“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.”*

It seemed like twenty nano-seconds after Thanksgiving, it had already begun. The advertizements...give to this charity. Give to the hungry children. Great! Will we hear those requests as if from Jesus Himself?

A wise person once said, “We don’t think our way into a new way of acting. We act our way into a new way of thinking.” The more you and I can love one another here in this safe space, the easier it will be to feed, clothe, and give shelter to God’s children out there.

To that end, I’m asking you to participate in a simple exercise. We’re going to act our way into thinking. You were all given an empty Dixie cup.

In a moment, I’d like you to pair up with someone you don’t know. It would be great if everyone could have a partner.

Then you’re going to model vulnerability. You share with your partner what you need from God. Comfort. Guidance. Healing. Presence. Love. Patience.

Your partner will then say, “In Jesus’ name, I offer you God’s cup of \*\*comfort.” Give them the Dixie cup that is actually filled with God’s love for them, through you. Then you switch so each person gets a turn.

This will feel vulnerable. That’s what Love does. Let me go first.

When we can love one another in vulnerable ways through the help of the Holy Spirit, then we can love the world in the same way. Here’s to food cooking, water cup drinking, car sheltering and loving the least of these God’s children. Yes, we can! Amen.