

One day Jesus will return. Alleluia! But what are we supposed to be doing between now and then, between now and eternity? That's what I want to talk about this morning.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his 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 gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. ' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? ' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. '

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, 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 no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. ' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you? ' 45 Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, 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."

Here's a Bible study tip: When you're reading your Bible and something catches your attention, cross-reference it by looking in the same book before you begin looking elsewhere. For example, we just read about the 2nd Coming in Matthew 25. What else does the Lord say in Matthew about his return?

In **Matthew 13:49**, **“(Jesus said,) So it will be at the end of the age: The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous.”**

And in **Matthew 16:27** **“(Jesus said,) the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.”**

The first time he came to us, Jesus came as a babe in a manger—a humble setting. The first time he came, he preached a message of repentance and mercy, forgiveness and hope. The first time he came to us, he came to suffer and die for our sins.

But one day Jesus will return, and he will not come in humility, but with glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will not come with a message of repentance, for the time for repenting will be spent. But he will come with the sword of judgment. Indeed, the Lord Jesus will not come to suffer again, but he will come to administer God's justice on all evil.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus said, **Matthew 25:32**, **“the Son of Man...will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”**

Like the other passages about the 2nd Coming, there's a separation between the people of God and the enemies of God. The interesting part here is how the distinction is made. He uses the picture language of sheep and goats to identify all humanity.

About the sheep, Jesus said, **Matthew 25:35**, **“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.... 40 (For) as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”**

Jesus said the goats did otherwise: **Matthew 25:45: “as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me,”** he said.

Some preachers believe Jesus was trying to scare us into repentance. For we all know that, in truth, we are all goats! We don't love enough; we don't serve enough; we don't have enough compassion. So we hear his words, we examine ourselves, and we repent for our inability to do what he said we should be doing.

Other preachers say this passage is evidence that we must serve just as Jesus tells us to do, for we will be judged just as he says. So we better get busy!

However, the very foundation of our faith is that Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day, and that the gift of eternal life is ours by virtue of Holy Baptism. End of story.

So what's going on here? Was Jesus confused? Had he not figured out how he was going to redeem us yet? I think what Jesus said about how he'll judge people goes back to what he's taught all along, that we are sheep, his sheep, and as such, we should act like sheep, following him, our Shepherd.

Indeed, our Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, is nothing if he's not compassionate, loving, generous, and kind, fulfilling his own words: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned.

I was hungry, and Jesus fed me with his Word in his Supper. I was thirsty, and he quenched my thirst with Living Water. I was once a stranger to God, but he welcomed me into his house as a child of God. I was stripped of all those things I once thought made life meaningful. But he clothed me with his righteousness. I was sick in spirit and heart, but the Lord healed me with the sweet balm of Gilead, forgiving me all my sins. I was imprisoned in the darkness of my own flesh, but Jesus set me free. **“For if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed!” (John 8:36).**

So you see, our Lord gave us a command which he has already fulfilled in our own lives, lifting us up out of the darkness into his light. The Good Shepherd has bestowed on his sheep—on you and me—everything we need to follow after him.

St. Paul said that we were saved by grace through faith and then he said, **Ephesian 2:10, “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”**

In other words, faith and acts of service cannot be separated. C.S. Lewis wrote, “Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good works or faith in Christ... It does seem to me like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary.”

Sheep are simple creatures, and so Jesus explained what faith looks like so simply mere sheep could understand it. This is SHEEP-LIKE FAITH.

One of the huge benefits of belonging to a church is that it provides a staging ground for doing good works. We have all the tools we need right here at Faith Lutheran to make a difference in our community, living out our faith in the name of Jesus.

Friends in Christ, this week let us think of the Lord’s work in our hearts in the same way he does, that we were hungry, thirsty, naked, and imprisoned, and he cared for us, he healed us.

This week may we have the opportunity to express our faith through an act of service for another person, bring the light of Christ into our little corner of the world.

And this week may we have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.