

“Christ is Coming”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, November 26th, 2017

Matthew 25 – Reign of Christ Sunday

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.” Here, so simply, in a few words, is the message for our hearts. “Just as you did it to one of these of these, you did it to me.”

Words that show us the path to follow. Words that are hard to follow. Words that carry judgement.

Today is the Reign of Christ Sunday, the last Sunday of the liturgical year, a Sunday when the theme of Christ’s work and teachings and death and resurrection culminate in this scene of the Last Day of Judgement. This is the only description of the last judgement in the New Testament. Christ comes triumphant, accompanied by a multitude of angels, and is sitting upon a throne of glory.

And all people gather before him. And he will begin to separate the people from one another, as the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be to his right and the goats will be to his left. To the sheep on his right he will say, Come and inherit your reward.

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. 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. Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

And the goats will be separated from the sheep and placed on his left. And to the goats, he will say, ‘Just as you did NOT do it to one of the least, you did NOT do it to me.’”

I feel that the goats might have protested, saying, “If we had only known it was you, Jesus, well then, of course, we would have offered our coat, given you food.”

When there is a calculation as to the benefit of the action, i.e. what will I gain by it, then you are clearly a goat. Notice how there is no in-between-pile here – a sort of hybrid between a sheep and goat. Jesus gives us two choices – sheep or goat.

Christ will judge only on the help that has been given. To feed, clothe, welcome, cheer, visit. Jesus is asking for simple gestures, simple yet direct. Simple yet risky. Jesus is looking for a call to discipleship that goes above counting the costs, goes beyond all sense of self.

A quote from Mother Theresa: “At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have

done. We will be judged by “I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.”

Hungry not only for bread, but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing, but naked of human respect and dignity. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks, but homeless because of rejection.”

This parable is about grace and judgement and accountability before Christ. And we learn in this parable that faith is not about “Do this or else you are going to eternal damnation.”

Faith is about getting in touch with the love of Christ which makes us want to respond by living in a way that is pleasing to Christ, that is Christ-like. We are saved neither by grace nor even by accepting the gospel, but by how we treat other people.

A commentary offered this: “There is nothing in this scripture about ecclesiastical connections or religious practices. There is not a word in this passage about theology, creeds, orthodoxies.

There is only one criterion here: whether or not you see Jesus Christ in the face of the needy and whether or not you give yourself away in love in his name.”¹

When Jesus asserts at the end of the parable that the goats, the ones on the left, will go into eternal punishment, I have to think about this. Where is the mercy? Where is God’s love?

God’s mercy is in the ways God tries to guide us in our lives, point us, directing us to the ways we should think about living. We are grace-filled and within us we each have the potential to be true living examples of God’s love.

Jesus doesn’t put the goats into the goat group. We do, by our own actions. We do, be separating ourselves from God’s presence very time we refuse to see Christ in the least amongst them. Jesus basically says, “You didn’t care about others. Get over with the goats.”

Thom Shuman, a colleague from my online midrash conversation group wrote poignantly about this parable in our lives: “When we look at the hungry, do we see a little child whose body is slowly wasting away, or a dysfunctional family?

When someone stops us on a hot day and asks for a cool drink, do we see a parched brother or sister, or a panhandler?

When someone who dresses different from us or talks 'funny' comes to our church, do we see a possible new friend, or a potential threat?

¹ Feasting on the Word,

When we meet someone who shivers in winter's blast because all they have is a thin shirt, do we see a person we could offer a warm jacket or someone who obviously makes poor choices?

When we hear that a friend has been sentenced for a crime, do we wonder what happened and reach out to them, or are we convinced they got what they deserved?"

I remember a conversation when at Emmanuel College. The student spoke of a congregation that was proud of its continuing involvement in the local shelter, citing it in its Annual Report as a real high point in the outreach of the congregation into the local community.

Specifically, the report highlight the monthly communion services held at the shelter. The woman in my class worked at the shelter. And this is what she saw.

The people from the congregation sat on one side of the chapel. The residents of the shelter sat on the other. Communion was served by the residents. Before the communion, the Peace of Christ was exchanged. And you can visualize the movement in the chapel – the congregation people mingled amongst themselves; and the shelter people were left to themselves.

The thing about the people in the shelter is that some of them had not showered in a while, their clothes were dirty. And frankly, they didn't smell very nice. So at communion, the residents went up to receive communion from the hands of their friends. But the congregation people stayed in their pews. They were unable to receive communion from the hands of the homeless. Is that something you or I could do? A question to ponder. What are the barriers? What are your limits? To Christ, there were no barriers, no limits.

Our separation into the sheep and the goats does not happen on that day in the future when the King will judge us. Our separation happens every day when we respond to those in need amongst us.

In every person we meet, in every act of love and compassion which we undertake, we have the opportunity to determine which side we will be.

Notice how on this day of judgement, Christ does not have to make a decision – it's already been made for him. We have made it for him – by our actions, or lack of actions.

As we begin this week, let us give thanks for God's presence, and for the choices we have to make. Let us give thanks for God who chooses to be with us.

Let us give thanks for God's grace in our lives, for the grace to repent of our goatish days, for the grace to begin again another day, for the grace to ask help in opening our eyes and our hearts to Christ among us. Thanks be to God. Amen.