



St John Lutheran Church

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Matthew 25:31-46
Judgment Day Surprise

According to today's Gospel, everybody gets a surprise on judgment day. That is, everybody receives the very thing that they do not believe they should have. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left" (Matthew 25:31-33). And everybody...sheep and goat alike...everybody will question the judgment that the Son of Man passes. Some people will like it and others will not... but all will question it.

The goats, of course, will have no interest in being goats... and they will make every attempt to get moved over to the other side of the judgment hall.

Indignantly they will bleat, "Surely there must be a mistake! When did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? (Matthew 24:44) We are opportunists! If we thought there was anything we could do to get on Your good side, God, we were there doing it! You are mistaken in Your judgment against us!"

Just as the goats receive that which they do not believe they ought to have... so also do the sheep. The sheep will rejoice that the eternal Shepherd should so identify them as His own... but even they will question the wisdom of His judgment. "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?" (Matthew 25:37-39)

The sheep know themselves too well. They know that if this Judge has passed His judgment on the basis of what they have done... surely He has made a mistake! The sheep know they have done nothing that could bring them to this blessed position. They blush at even their smallest acts of mercy and their smallest gestures of faith... knowing that their best intentions have always been riddled with the tumors and pollution of sin. But the Christ remembers only the mercy they have shown... and He sees in their small deeds that which they could never see for themselves. The Christ sees that which they themselves would never dare plead: "For as you have done to the least of these brothers of Mine," He declares, "you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). So when the Son of Man comes in His glory... and when He puts His beloved sheep on His right... separated out from the goats that have been condemned... the sheep will again gape in amazement at His tender mercy and Grace. For surely they do not belong in this blessed position and place, except for His merciful tenderness and His overflowing grace.

All nations are here gathered, all peoples are now separated "as a shepherd separates a sheep from the goats" (Matthew 25:32), all human labors are here judged... and yet the Lord Jesus Christ remains the heart and center of the conversation:

The nations are gathered here on account of Him, raised up from the dead by the power of His resurrection and gathered together by the strength of His arm: "He is their judge, and He is the basis of their judgment" (Martin Franzmann, Follow Me).

The peoples are separated on account of Him... for He Himself has called to them from eternity, saying, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and He who does not gather with Me scatters" (Matthew 12:30). And again He declares, "No one comes to the Father except by Me" (John 14:6).

Notice here that we are NOT saved by our works...that is our Christ's job and only He could do for us that which we could never do for ourselves ... BUT...All labors are judged...and they are judged by the standard of

the Son of Man Himself. **The life devoid** of faith will produce **works devoid of mercy... but the** life possessed by the crucified Christ, **will produce those same mercies** that the Christ Himself produced.

Those who refuse to BE served by this Christ will in no way serve this Christ... **and the** judgment against them is well spoken, **"Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me"** (Matthew 25:46).

So even though the Son of Man will speak of what the sheep have done and the goats have failed to do... **this Gospel** yet remains focused on Him and only Him... **not upon** the sheep and goats. **This focus on Jesus** is what creates the sense of surprise for everyone on the Last Day. **Jesus is why everybody receives the very thing that they do not believe they should have.**

Those whom Jesus separates out as goats will be sent away for this one reason... **they would have nothing to do with Him.** **"Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels"** (Matthew 25:41). **It is as if** Jesus would say with these words, **"I did not create hell for you; this place is reserved for the devil and his demons. I created heaven for you, but you would have nothing of it. I overcame the power of this eternal death for you, swallowing it up in My own death and resurrection, but you loved your own death more than My life. I came to you so that you would never be separated from Me, and you only ran away. I bore your punishment so that you would not be punished, and you refused the remission. Depart from Me, not because I wanted this, but because you demanded it."** **If they will** refuse His mercy, they will of course refuse to act mercifully... **"Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me"** (Matthew 24:45).

Those whom Jesus separates out as sheep will be gathered into eternity with the resounding invitation and command, **"Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"** (Matthew 25:34). **I have prepared this place for all mankind of all time... but only you few would have anything to do with it.** From eternity, I have shined like a light in the darkness, and that light has drawn you to Me. I have uprooted your sin and you did not seek to replant it again... I died your death and you joined Me in resurrection... you offered no excuses for your old condition but remained instead the new creation I created for you in My Body and My Blood. **Come! It is all yours! It is waiting for you! For the very mercy by which you lived your lives is My mercy, shown first to you... poured out for you and through you to those whom I sent to you.** **"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me"** (Matthew 25:35-36). **You loved not your own lives, but you loved Mine. And now, My dearly beloved sheep, now My life is yours.**

This is the Christian faith, Dear Saints... **that we live our lives** here in the repentant realization that, when the Son of Man returns, **we shall not be treated as we ought. We ought to** be cast aside into that place prepared for the devil and all his angels... **yet by the** Grace of our God we will not. **Ours is already** the white, holy robe of salvation... **ours is** already the overflowing mercy of God that finds hidden expression in our earthly lives... **ours is** already the sheepfold of security... **and ours** is the musical word of our victorious and returning Lord, **"Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"** (Matthew 25:34). In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit...Amen

Second to the Last Sunday of the Church Year, 2008

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