

“As you did to the least you did for me!”

(Matthew 25:31 – 36)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SETTING OF THIS PARABLE:

In the previous chapter 24 verse 3b the disciples had asked Jesus, “**What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?**” to which Jesus responded with words of warning and parables, culminating with this parable in today’s Gospel.

Jesus said:

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³²All 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. ³³He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”

The disciples understood this image. In those days when the shepherds came down from the hills at night, they would divide the sheep for the sheep pen and the goats for the goat pen.

Jesus continued,

³⁴“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For 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, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

They said, ‘When did we ever do these things for you?’

The king replied:

⁴⁰I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.

⁴¹Then the king addressed the goats on the left: ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴²For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you

did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴They said, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

NB: It's very important to pay special attention to the difference between the two verdicts:

"Then the King will say to those on his RIGHT, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom PREPARED FOR YOU since the creation of the world.'"

AND

"Then the King will say to those on his LEFT, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire PREPARED FOR THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS.'"

God's eternal desire is, and always has been, that ALL be saved! Those on the left made their choice and now have to live with it.

What we learn from this parable is the awareness that our God, the God who created the universe, is a God who comes in such humble ways:

"¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:10-12

Isaiah says:

"²He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account." Isaiah 53:2-3

Our God came into the world in Christ, and, as John says, ***"though the world was made through him, the world did not RECOGNIZE [acknowledge] him."*** It's no wonder that the righteous are just as surprised as the unrighteous, that they had encountered Christ and didn't know it.

Christ is still in the world! He is still **LORD!** So, where is he to be found today? And how is his Lordship seen in the lives of people!

CHRIST IS ENCOUNTERED IN THE MOST OBVIOUS AND CERTAIN PLACE:

In Word and Sacrament, and fellowship of worship.

And

CHRIST'S LORDSHIP IS SEEN IN HIS PEOPLE!

Remember how Jesus explained what God's commandments were all about - about how we are to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and our neighbour as ourselves?

Love is the fulfilment of the Law.

But its not your ordinary romantic kind of love. It's a special kind of love.

A new Commandment Jesus called it:

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:34,35

All people can, and do, exercise some qualities of love! But the love Jesus speaks of is way different! It is a love that comes from God! It's to be like the love Jesus had for us!

Jesus said how this love is to be made visible in his people:

"I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you."

Matthew 5:44

The Apostle Paul expands on this when he says:

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:14-18

The Apostle John says how this love is expressed:

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" [1 John 3:17]

He also said:

"Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

1 John 4:20,21

What Jesus is teaching us in this parable is that if we confess Jesus as our Lord, then we will also do as he did, and that is:

EMBRACE A SUFFERING WORLD IN NEED.

You see not only is Christ encountered In Word and Sacrament, and fellowship of worship, but

CHRIST'S LORDSHIP IS ALSO TO BE SEEN IN US, HIS PEOPLE!

What does this mean for us today?

First, it means to have the love of Christ poured into our hearts! And God did this at Baptism:

“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who he has given us.” Romans 5:5

We cannot be God's loving people and embrace hurting people unless the love of Christ is in us! That's why Paul wasn't boasting, when he said: ***“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”*** Philippians 4:13

It begins at home, in the unconscious acts of love, forgiveness, and understanding towards our family, our community of faith, and the community at large. You don't even realise you are doing it. ***“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”*** 1 Corinthians 15:10

This quality of love then spreads from your home circle – to the ends of the earth. The love of God living inside of us begins to reach out to all kinds of people and we don't even know it.

You see, the truth about the gospel is that our God has come into our world, and is in our world. And more than that, we are invited to seek him where he is to be found. Beginning in the most obvious place: Word and Sacrament, and fellowship of worship. This is why Christians are urged

²⁵ ***Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.***[Hebrews 10:25], so that we continue to:

“be filled with the Spirit.” [Ephesians 5:18]. **Amen.**

Sermon by Pastor John Simboras, 22 November 2020