

November 30, 2014 – First Sunday in Advent

End Times Series

To Those on His Right He Will Say, “Come . . .”

Matthew 25:31–46



Dear friends in Christ,

Once more we continue with the series on the End of Times, or as people know it as Judgment Day. The Bible also calls it the Great Day of the Lord. But like Jesus' disciples we too have questions as to the signs, what's going to happen and what Jesus expects us to be doing while we await that great day. And although today we begin the season of Advent in

preparation for the celebration of the coming Messiah, we certainly look forward to the coming of the Great Day of the Lord, for that's what the Messiah comes to accomplish to enter Heaven, to bring us to heaven upon His second coming.

And for our purpose today our meditation will focus on the Gospel reading of Matthew 25:31–46 where Jesus tells us: ³¹ “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, saying, ‘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, saying, ‘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.”

On the Great Day of the Lord, God, Jesus will gather all people past and present in His presence “Before him will be gathered all the nations.” Every single human being will be there, believers and unbelievers will be there. But as soon as everybody will gather they will be separated into two groups, into “sheep” and “goats.” Those on the right hand of Jesus will be the “sheep” and those on the left will be the “goats.”

The question that we all need to ask this morning is this: "Where will I be" on the right or on the left, will I be a "sheep" or a "goat"? Now the idea is a little bit scary, don't you think, because of what's going to happen with each group? As you see the "sheep" are going to be welcomed into Heaven, but the "goats" are sent into eternal condemnation.

"So, will I be on His right when the Son of Man comes? What if I'm not? That's an awesome prospect, to stand in front of the Son of Man, coming with all the angels and sitting on His glorious throne, then separating the nations into two groups and I'll be in one of those groups. But what I don't want to be in is on the left side, the wrong place. Now, how does one get in the wrong place? How do those on His left end up there? I'm a little apprehensive about the Last Day, and even scared. Although my human reason tells me that if Jesus is a loving Savior the He wouldn't want me to be afraid of His coming at the end of time, does He, and more, surely a loving Savior will not allow for goats to happens, after all is He is a loving savior, if so then all will go to heaven, right?

Certainly not! As we see in the Scriptures and in today's reading, there will be those who will be granted entrance into heaven and there are those who won't. God's will is that all be saved for sure, that all be in heaven, and that's what Christ came to do to bring all to Heaven. But the truth is that not all would want to be in heaven, they are the "goats" who will be on the left of Christ. It is easy to become a goat. It is simple just reject God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and all His blessings, like His words, the sacraments, the church, and you are set. And this also happens when we think it is all about us.

I don't know how much you know about goats and sheep, but they do have their own characteristics. For starters goats are capricious. They are impulsive and unpredictable, devious and contrary. If they are not poking their heads through fences, they may be standing on their hind legs, stretching for those tender leaves just out of reach. Goats are never content with what they have.

They are experts in opening gates and squeezing through small gaps because they hate to be confined. They will work tirelessly to spring themselves from any situation they deem inhibiting. Consequently, goats are not very good followers. They don't like being in groups, but they like leading or going off on their own. Meat packers use this instinct in goats to their advantage. They will train an old goat, appropriately called a "Judas," to lead sheep to the pens for slaughter. A well-trained Judas will lead group after group of sheep to the slaughter all day long. They have fallen out of use in recent times, but can still be found in various smaller slaughterhouses in some parts of the world.

Goats do have some good traits that even in the Old Testament God encourages His people to be like one, but generally, well a goat is a goat. And if those traits, the bad ones are found in a Christian, they can be spiritually deadly. For example, a Christian who is unpredictable, who thinks he is above it all, who independently does his own thing, who doesn't live or want the leadership of Christ but instead rejects Him, exhibits the characteristic of a goat. A Christian who bullies other Christian or people and is not kind with others, also exhibiting the characteristics of a goat, and they will be the ones asking Jesus on that day: "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?" (Matt. 25:44). But they will be told: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil

and his angels.” Why would Jesus do that? Because somebody displaying the traits of a goat is essentially and fundamentally the same as one who is a non-Christian, the one who rejects Christ. That’s Jesus basis for His judgment, how He was treated, how you treated Christ! Of course, their treatment of Christ manifests itself in how they treated those in whom Christ lived, those who had His Spirit.

Now, there is something else we need to learn from Jesus’ words today. Jesus, our Judge, eliminates the possibility of hypocrisy on our part. If the goats had thought that treating their brothers in the faith would have gotten them into the Kingdom, they would have done it, you know just being good and let’s get it done with acts of kindness for that will get us into heaven! But that’s not what Jesus’ intention is. Rather He is interested in love from the heart, not a false love, love that He has shown and given us first, love that he has demonstrated on the Cross of Calvary.

The true love of God is seen in the sheep, through the Sheep, as was seen in the Elder Brother Jesus. As the sheep respond to their brother's need, they are united in their distress and at the same time unknowingly and without hypocrisy, serve Christ and in turn become little Christs to others. Apparently, they are not even aware of what they were doing. This is a kind of love that cannot be faked or forced upon. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35).

The reaction of the goats is quite different. They have little sympathy for God's way and remain indifferent and also remain indifferent to the needs of others. In so doing, they reject their Messiah, their King, since He lived in the people whom they would not serve. The goats are condemned because of their sins of omission.

But the sheep on the other hand as they had responded to Christ’s call to fellowship with Him, they do so through prayer, Bible study, and the regular and faithful use of the Sacraments. The sheep have been given an overflowing measure of God’s love by the working presence of the Spirit: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5).

A godly life always comes down to the basic things. The sheep have been enabled to be simply and unconsciously kind, sympathetic, and concerned, and these are attributes of character that cannot be pretended. The sheep are also sociable and desire to be in a flock, in fact the term "Gregarious behavior" is a term that refers to the flocking or herding instinct which is found strongly in sheep.

A sheep follows its Shepherd, peacefully moving forward with the flock. A sheep is content to be led because he has faith in Him. A sheep responds to his Shepherd's voice and goes where he directs. That’s why Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the door.” (Luke 10:7-9), then a little later he said: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (Luke 10:14-15)

So, where do you think you will be on that day, on side of the Sheep? Or the goats maybe?

John the Baptist preached these words: ‘Bear fruit in keeping with repentance’ ‘Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire’ (Matt. 3:8,10). And Jesus says that: ‘his angels . . . will gather . . . all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace’ (Matt. 13:41–42).

All of that sound scary, doesn't it? Our sins are really scary and can potentially drive us to the goats' side, to the left hand of Christ. And yes there is the potential to be told: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41). All because of our sins.

But, hear once again what Jesus says: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned" (John 3:18). Jesus adds that those who believe have "eternal life" and have "passed from death to life" (John 5:24). "But whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (John 3:18).

And notice how Jesus describes those on his right, "The righteous will answer him" (Mt 25:37). How did those on his right come to be "the righteous"? It is by believing Christ. The people who believe in Jesus will be on his right, and he will say to them, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father." But to those who have not believed in Jesus are condemned to be on his left and will hear Jesus say, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mt 25:41).

The author of Hebrews writes, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb 9:27). After death, each person faces judgment, here when the Son of Man comes, sitting on his glorious throne. Thus, those to be on his right and those to be on his left is decided while a person is living, determined by her believing in Jesus (on his right) or not believing (on his left.)

But the Good News is that those who believe and trust Christ are already declared righteous, that their sins are already forgiven because the one who will separate sheep from goats first became a lamb—the Lamb of God, suffering on the cross the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. What the angel had told Joseph before Jesus birth, has come true: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Jesus paid the price for the debt of your sins and mine, suffering the eternal fire. We believe in Jesus, who saved us from our sins. That means you, a believer, will be on His right when the Son of Man comes. He will tell you, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." You will stand with those believers he calls "righteous." And you will be with those who go into eternal life.

Therefore dear friends, lets hold on to the faith that Jesus has given us, lets take seriously our baptismal grace, let's take seriously Church and all His gifts, so that by doing so we don't reject the Holy Spirit, we don't Reject Christ. But if we have done so, today is the day, He is her to forgive us our sins, He is here to declare us righteous and he is her to enable us to be His sheep.

In His name, amen.