

## 112623 Sermon "The Sheep and the Goats" Matthew 25:31-46

Have you ever read the story "King Midas and the Golden Touch"? The tale of King Midas is about the tragedy of greed and recounts what could happen when true happiness is not recognized and appreciated. King Midas had everything, but he was a man who wished for more and asked for a wish where everything he touched would turn into gold until his food and even his daughter have suffered from his alchemy, he realizes he was wrong.

This is also a story about gratitude and appreciation. Midas didn't realize what's truly important to him until he's lost it. Once he got rid of the golden touch, he began to appreciate not only his beloved daughter, but also the simple treasures of life, such as cold water and bread and butter.

We are celebrating the Thanksgiving holiday. Of course, a lot has happened in the world in 2023, but there is a lot to be thankful for in your daily life. It is true that gratitude, whether we experience it ourselves or receive it from others, can be of great benefit to us. If we think of each other, are kind to each other, and are grateful for what we have, we'll all be better off.

In today's Gospel of Matthew chapter 25, the parable of the sheep and goats tells us that when you share your love and gratitude for the Lord with others in the language of small acts of kindness, the Lord remembers and rewards you.

Jesus gives us five parables regarding the end times in Matthew 24 and 25. Today's story tells us that on the day of Jesus' return, Jesus will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. In Palestine where the temperature changes a lot between day and night, the sheep can endure cold temperature well unlike goats; goats need to sleep in warm places. Hence, during the day, sheep and goats are well mixed together when they graze the field. But at night, shepherds can easily distinguish the two when they sleep.

Verse 31 describes the return of Jesus. "The Son of Man comes in his glory." This clearly shows that his return will be quite different from the first time he

came as a baby on this earth 2000 years ago. Then, Jesus came as a lowly and humble one, with only one purpose: To save people from the power of sin and death through his love and sacrifice.

Unlike the first coming, however, Christ's return is glorious like the king who won victory. It says he will come in his own glory. And he sits on the "throne of glory." The criteria Jesus used in separating sheep and goats were 1. Whether you gave me food when I was hungry, 2. Whether you gave me something to drink when I was thirsty, 3. Whether you received me when I was a stranger, 4. Whether you cared for me when I was sick, 5. Whether you gave me clothes when I was naked, 6. Whether you came to comfort me when I was prisoned.

Interestingly, however, both the sheep and the goats respond, "When did we see you in need and help you?" Neither the sheep nor the goats are surprised at the place Jesus assigns them. They do not respond to the place that Jesus assigns them, but they express surprise at the reasons he gives for his judgment. The basis of his judgment is how they treated the Lord! Of course, their treatment of Jesus manifests itself in how they treated others in need.

Just as the disciples did not recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus, and just as Mary did not recognize the resurrected Jesus at first, Jesus did not reveal who he was from the beginning. Why did Jesus do this?

The reason we can think rationally is this. In our lives, we meet people who are good only when others see them. Like a student who only pretends to be nice when the teachers see them, an employee who only pretends to work hard when the boss sees them, and a person who appears nice to others but looks down on others on the inside. However, although people can be deceived, our Lord, who sees the heart of people, usually judges them by looking at their lives, not by how they act in front of others.

Jesus eliminates the possibility of hypocrisy clouding his judgment of the sheep and the goats. When the sheep respond to the needs of their neighbors, they unite in suffering and at the same time, unconsciously and without hypocrisy, become united with the Lord. Apparently, they don't even

know what they are doing. This is a kind of love that cannot be faked.

The Lord says in verse 40, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." The Lord identifies Himself with the "least of these."

If Jesus had revealed Himself from the beginning, pretty much everyone would have treated him well. Typically, people like to serve those who are famous and powerful, because they think that something can be gained.

But it is easy to neglect the "least of these." For they have nothing to give back. But the Lord says "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Proverbs 19:17 says, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full." What would the Creator owe to His creatures? But, he says, what we do to the neglected and marginalized, i.e. the least of these, is what we do to Him. What a blessing!

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy wrote a touching short story entitled "Where Love Is, God Is."

Long ago, there lived an old shoemaker named Martin. Martin lived alone in his home shop. But his work was of the finest quality and he was always honest with his customers. He tried to live the way Jesus taught. One night as he was sleeping, he heard a voice. "Martin. Martin. Look tomorrow on the streets for I am coming."

Martin awoke unsure if he had been dreaming. That morning, he set to work as usual. But could not help but look steadfastly out the window onto the street. Just in case his beloved Jesus appeared. As he was watching, Martin noticed an old soldier out in the freezing cold shoveling snow. Martin invited him into his shop and gave him something warm to drink.

Later in the day, Martin noticed a young mother cradling a small child in her arms. She had no coat. Martin insisted she come in and warm herself by the fire. He learned that the day before, she had sold her shawl to buy food. After she had eaten, the old cobbler gave her some coins. And gave her his

own coat.

In the evening, an old woman selling some apples appeared. A hungry little boy came along and tried to steal an apple. But the woman grabbed him and threatened to take him to the police. Martin rushed out into the street and begged her to let the boy go. Martin paid for the apple himself and gave it to the boy. He promised to not steal again.

Martin returned to his shop and kept working. When night came, Martin put his tools away, disappointed that he waited all day and Jesus had not come. As he lit the candle however, a voice whispered to him, "Martin. Martin. Did you not recognize me?" From the dim corner of his shop, the old soldier, the mother and her child, the boy and the old woman stepped into the light. "It is I" they whispered. And then the old cobbler understood.

He pulled out his well-worn scriptures and read these words, "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, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then Martin knew his dream had been real after all and Jesus truly had visited him that day.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, this story teaches us that treating the smallest people around us and encouraging them is serving the Lord and is a concrete way to love God. Develop your relationship with Jesus in your daily life in gratitude. Love your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And love your neighbors as yourself. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.