2026 11 22 Matthew 25:31-46
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Come, You Blessed!

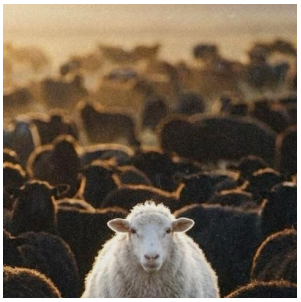
Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. Next week we begin Advent, and the new Lectionary church year starts from the first Sunday of Advent.



Each year UMC pastors do a health check thoroughly through a very special organization, Quest Diagnostics. We make an appointment, sit in the waiting room, and then have a complete physical examination, in order for a team of medical professionals to measure my wellness. It is not entirely comfortable, but it is absolutely necessary. The numbers of the result tell you where you should focus on your health. For me, glucose is a little outside of the healthy range, and my LDL cholesterol level is a little high. I think it is not too bad for my age. However, reading the chart, I know what to do. In many ways, today's Scripture is like a spiritual wellness check. And the truth often comes outside of ourselves. God wants our spiritual health and wants us to be guided to where the direction is.

Matthew 25:31-33, the Son of Man comes in his glory and sits on his throne, and all the nations are gathered before him. Then he separates people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats in Jesus' time. Notice the picture. This King is a shepherd. And a shepherd knows his flock by looking closely. This is the King's checkup: an honest examination by the One who sees what we cannot see.

This passage might make us a little nervous. But hear it this morning as someone who loves you telling you the truth while there is still time to respond. We can feel fine and still not know our real state. So let us sit in the exam room, not in fear but in trust, and see what the King finds.



To those on his right, the King says, in **Matthew 25:34, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was hungry, and you fed me. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was sick, and you cared for me."** And the sheep say, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food?"

The king turns to the goats group and gives a verdict that is completely different. Goats could not recognize their neglect either. Who are the goats? They are not cartoon villains. They call him "Lord." They are surprised and a little offended, as if to say, if we had known it was you, of course we would have helped. They did not hate the poor. Their heart didn't have merciful sensitivity. Their eyes were open, but there were not truly open… blinded in some ways.

So, one group was shaped by love. The King told them, "Come, you blessed." And invited them into the eternal Kingdom. The other goats group to eternal fire. And neither was able to recognize their lifestyle. However, the King's word revealed who they were.

So, we want to check what kind of heart shows mercy without knowing it. I find that the heart of the Blessed is written in the Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mountain. So, two passages mirror each other directly.

<u>The Beatitudes describe the inward heart of the blessedness of the Sheep people (the roots of a tree)</u>: Being poor in spirit, knowing that there is nothing good from self to bring to the Lord. Those who mourn are those who were mourning over a broken world, showing humility, hungering for righteousness, and being merciful. It is a portrait of Jesus, it is also a portrait of little Jesus, followers of Jesus. The Sheep had this spirit, and this heart was expressed outward by feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, and caring for the sick and imprisoned. It is in the state of true-self that has the Holy Spirit in their soul.

Specifically, Jesus says in **<u>Matthew 5:7, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."*</u>** Matthew 25 is the final judgment scene where that exact promise comes true—the merciful receive the ultimate mercy of eternal life, because nobody has the right to receive the eternal kingdom. "Merciful" is a heart whose compassion has become second nature. Pure in heart is an inner life undivided and clear enough to see.

The merciful are shown from the outside with a merciful lifestyle: feeding, welcoming, clothing, visiting. They are the same people, viewed from two angles. It is like that root and branch grow together. The Wesleyan tradition calls it holiness of heart and life.

The King says, "Come, you who are blessed." He is not meeting strangers at the judgment. He is welcoming the people he has been forming all along. So, the real question is not what we will say at the end. It is what we are becoming right now. And we can bring that question to God today.

If you think that 'I feel like a little closer toward Goats…', then invite the King's checkup this week. Have time with the Lord in the morning. If you do not have time, then make it. It is a matter of life and death. Not with the anxious kind, but with the honest mind, where we sit still and ask him to look. Pray the psalmist's words: "Search me, O God, and know my heart." Then listen.

Start the day with the Lord. Let the Spirit become the center of your heart, not yourself. Try to look for your true self - which is the self with God's breath breathed into the nostrils of Adam and Eve. The breath of God will reveal where you are, let you see your spiritual state. It will let you awaken from the dullness of heart and blindness.

Your heart will be touched somehow by the merciful heart of God. You will feel the life with lightness and freshness. Your blindness will open more and more towards the openness of the Lord. And wait the Holy Spirit further to receive the sensitivity to the nudging of the Holy Spirit. Let the Spirit open your spiritual eyes to see around people. A checkup that finds a problem early is a gift.

Start to practice mercy courageously with the Holy Spirit, which is small, regular, and unnoticed. Joy will overflow. They did ordinary, repeated things, and the King's list is concrete. And the sheep people will do the beautiful works as the King said. They will do so with gratitude to the Lord, and they know also the work is done by the Lord. So, there is nothing to be proud of. So natural, and humble, so genuine. So, they cannot remember.

Here are a few words the King said; the hungry, the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned. What can we do?

Volunteer or simply come to the FANT, our outreach ministry, which is growing amazingly. Meet people there, welcome people who are hungry for food and genuine relationships. Give them a smile, and warm welcoming hands. Also Invite your neighbor to the table, so that they may find good friends there.

Greet strangers actively! If it is within ten feet, walk toward them, and introduce yourself, and welcome them. Learn a name. Welcome refugees, immigrants, people unknown to you. Offer a seat and sit together. Make them

comfortable in our space or where you are. Let their hearts be comforted in your space. Here on a Sunday morning or at FANT or at work.



Now, FANT people who were once visitors have become regular participants. At the last pre-Thanksgiving dinner, we had 90 participants, including volunteers. This was a larger gathering than our main worship service. Someone asked why they don't attend the worship service. The reason is that there is greater joy to be there. If they don't come to the service, why don't we go to the FANT space? If someone is sick, I let them know and visit them, send a card, and make a call. I witness how God is working in this space. I see God is working there.

Look around your neighborhood. And think who is living alone. Invite them, so that they may find good friends at the FANT. Let the lonely know that they are not alone. Whoever they are, send a small card with the word of God filled with promises and comforts, or phone call by asking caring questions.

Above all else, have the time with the Lord in the morning, and let your heart join the Lord, protected and guided throughout the day. So that your life becomes a liturgical word for the worshipful life. Request the Lord to open your eyes to the needs of others.

Matthew 25:40 states, "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."

Now let me return to the exam room and the number. It told me the truth while there was still time to act. Nobody sends us to a checkup to condemn us. They send us so we may live well and receive health. It is grace to learn the number while there is still time. The Shepherd, who examines us, knows each of his sheep by name and has laid down his life for the flock. He is looking for hearts he can heal, and he has already prepared the kingdom for us.

Let the Holy Spirit guide us to respond with a humble and grateful heart, awakening our spiritual eyes. Let the Holy Spirit nudge us to pour our hearts toward those around us who are in need of love. In doing so, we will find joy and be comforted in the present, and we will be the blessed in eternity.

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Let us pray.

Christ our King, Shepherd. Examine us with your gentle eyes. Show us what we have not seen, heal what has gone numb, and make us merciful as you are merciful. Let our mercy grow so ordinary that we forget we are doing it. We ask it in your name. Amen.