

Pastor T.C. Arnold
26th Sunday after Trinity
Matthew 25:31-43
November 19th, 2017

The Gospel text from Matthew 25:34 says *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are my Father’s blessed one; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”* Some traditions refer to this text as the “Christ the King” or “Sunday of the Fulfillment” reading and use it for the last Sunday in the Church-year... even though we still have one more Sunday in the Church-year this year. The Lord Jesus is the one sitting on His throne. The Lord Jesus is the one who calls Himself, “King” in this passage just read. This also appears to be the only passage in Scripture which Jesus refers to Himself as King. He would be despised and rejected by some – just like any king or ruler we would know today. Also, in due course, He would show Himself sovereign over all – just like any king or ruler we would know today. He would speak His verdicts. The verdict is that some are put on His left... those are the goats. Others He would put on His right, those are the sheep. Those are the “blessed ones.” They will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

This is our Jesus who not only is the prophet who speaks the truth to His people. He not only is the priest who pleads for our lives to our heavenly Father. He is also our King. As a matter of fact, Luther’s Small Catechism refers to Jesus in this office of “King.” It says in the catechism that “As my King, Christ with His almighty power rules over all creatures, governs and protects His Church, and finally leads it to glory.” Our King rules over every creature He has ever made, governs and protects His bride the Church, and will lead His people to glory on the last day. And Jesus took the time and effort to explain to His disciples how they have been serving “The King” in their daily lives.

Beginning at verse 35 Jesus says, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger was I and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, in prison was I and you came to me.”* This is how Jesus explained how His creation, the same creation over which our King rules, is taken care of. God cares for us through our care for one another. This type of generosity was easily understood by those Jesus was talking to in the text for today. In 1st century Palestine, there were very few places we would call, “hotels.” There were very few clothing outlets and food pantries for those who were in need. The stranger is always in a somewhat difficult position. Where would he stay? There is no hotel. How would he eat? There are no restaurants or food pantries to get a good meal. Where will he get clean or dry clothes? There is no clothing outlet or “Goodwill” around the corner. People had to rely on the “good will” of others to survive in a strange town.

Christ the King, as He did then and does now, would rule with His almighty power over all His creatures...for the sake of His creatures. He takes care of His creation by and through His creation. He takes care of those who are less fortunate, those who are victims of a struggling economy, those who are in need through others like them who do have the means and the desire to help. God uses and “needs” you for the sake of others. And Jesus points out to those who were following Him that that is exactly what they have been doing – without even knowing they were doing this in the service of “the King.” And they didn’t even realize they were serving God by serving others.

Beloved in the Lord, I’m convinced this is an important mark of the Christian Life – When God’s people serve the Lord by serving their neighbor and not even know it. In other words, it’s a second nature reflex that doesn’t even take thought or consideration. That’s the way it was with Jesus disciples. Granted, Jesus disciples in the New Testament didn’t always express a mature faith – but

they remained faithful. And in their works, they expressed this faith in service. They didn't even recognize it. The reason, they were doing what they always did. They showed hospitality to their neighbor (a neighbor they knew or a stranger). Jesus shows how entertaining strangers was actually service to Him, for Jesus Himself can be found in those who are in need or those who are less fortunate. Our service to our neighbor is service to our Lord.

One thing must be clear; Jesus was showing the disciples their faith by showing their works. Jesus was not showing them that they are righteous because they did good works. This is a trap that many of us fall into. We hear from others, "*I think the good deed you just did earned you some points with the big man upstairs.*" While God smiles at our actions for the sake of His children, those works earn us no grace. Jesus is showing us in the text that He can identify the difference between the sheep and the goats based on how they acted upon their faith in Him on earth.

How does your faith show forth in its fruits? How do you serve your neighbor and your church? How can you serve your Savior better who gave up everything in service to you? Jesus our King and great Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats on the last day once said: "*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters?*" (Matt. 12:30). Our Lord desires us to "gather" with Him because the Kingdom of God is near. He is the King who rules His creation, governs and protects His church, and leads us to glory. And these last two parts – protecting His church and leading us to glory – are what we are met with today by our Lord.

Jesus protects us, His creation, through the gifts He gives to the church. This is the Gospel of forgiveness of sins that He so clearly shares with us in the Word of God. This is the promise that He loves His creation and preserves His Church on earth. While His church is persecuted in this world from all sides, He will not abandon her. He will keep her and preserve her. We can be confident of that.

Our Lord, through the protection that God gives to the church will also lead her to glory. We are the ones counted as the sheep – placed on God's right – because of the faith that is found in us. We can rejoice at this. But that doesn't mean we sit back and enjoy our favor found before God. God's grace doesn't belong to us only. It is for all people. How are we going to allow ourselves to be used as God's tools and instruments to bring people to the same side of Jesus that we enjoy today? Our faith is not a "spectator" blessing. It is a blessing that puts God's people into action, just like Jesus would show through the good deeds of His people toward others.

And the best deed of all – was done by our Jesus. He would never have us act without Him acting for us first. That's the blessed hope we have – a Jesus who did the work, who set the ultimate example, who put us into action by shedding His blood for us in the first place. We stand at the onset of the Lord's coming again, not serving ourselves, not looking away, but looking toward our Jesus and to our neighbor in Service. Come Lord Jesus quickly, we are waiting for you. We will not be disappointed. You have gifted us with what we don't deserve. Help us to be better workers for the sake of others so that they too might become your sheep placed by you on your right. You have done the work for us. We rejoice at what we have been given. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.