

Title: How Will We be Remembered?

Let us pray.

“Come Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we will be created, and you will renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ Jesus our Lord and our king.” Amen.

There is an old Irish legend that tells of a king who had no children to succeed him on the throne. So, he had his messengers post signs in every town and village of his kingdom inviting qualified young men to apply for an interview with the king. Two qualifications especially were stressed: The person must have a deep love for God and for his neighbor.

The young man around whom the legend centers saw one of these signs. He believed he had the necessary qualifications and he felt an inner calling to apply for an interview. But the young man was so poor he did not have decent clothes to wear for the interview. He also had no money to buy provisions for the long journey to the king’s castle. He decided to beg for clothes and the provisions he needed. When everything was ready he set out.

After a month’s travel, one day the man caught sight of the king’s castle. At about the same time he also caught sight of a poor old beggar sitting by the side of the road. The beggar held out his hands and pleaded for help. “I’m cold and hungry,” he said in a weak voice. “Could you give me something to eat and something to wear?”

The young man was moved by the sight of the beggar. He stripped off his warm outer clothes and exchanged them for the old tattered coat of the beggar. He also gave the beggar most of the provisions he had been carrying in his backpack for the return journey.

Then, somewhat uncertainly he walked on to the castle. The guards met him and took him to the visitors’ area. After a long wait he was led to the king. He bowed before the throne. When he straightened up, he could hardly believe his eyes. He said to the king, “You were the beggar besides the road.

Why'd you do this to me?" "I had to find out," said the king, "if you really did love God and neighbor."

Love God and love your neighbor are the two great commandments that Jesus gave us. The sincere young man could not let a poor, desperate man be ignored. It is easy to ignore the needy. Not everyone who appears needy really are and the needs seem overwhelming. Too overwhelming for one of us to solve. However, together we can do miracles. What kind of accounting can we make for ourselves?

After giving several parables about the end times, Jesus puts the topping on the cake. Jesus emphasized over and over again that no one knows when the second coming will be. Now, Jesus tells them what will happen "when the Son of Man comes in his glory." (Matthew 25:31a)

There were several Bible passages that were popular among the student body in seminary. This was one of them. One of the others was from Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Matthew 25 was popular because of the call to do social justice. The parts about the second coming and the cruel fate of the goats were largely ignored. Someone told me last week that they liked goats. Well, goats are great animals. We give goats as Christmas gifts that go to needy families in a third world country.

The scene in Matthew 25 is the Son of Man and all the angels judging all of humanity. Son of Man may be more literally translated as Son of Humanity. It was an apocalyptic term in Jesus' time. The coming of the Son of Humanity at the end times was a vision of the prophet Daniel (chapter 7). Sheep and goats are not literally separated. All humanity will be separated into two groups. One group has eternal joy and the other group does not. This passage is unique to Matthew.

The metaphor of separating sheep from goats was familiar to Jesus' listeners. Before sunset the shepherd would gather the white sheep into an enclosure while the black goats were left to fend for themselves. In other words, the sheep were protected while the goats were subject to predation. In

New Zealand, we learned that black sheep were born with a recessive gene. Their wool was almost worthless because it could not be dyed, unless you wanted black wool.

Jesus shifts the reference from the Son of Man to a king. That may be why this passage is thought to be appropriate for Christ the King Sunday. The Son of Man, the king, may be interpreted as Jesus, though Jesus does not make the direct connection. There are no “I” statements.

The criteria that determines what group each person will join involves how we treat other people, especially when they are in crises. That criterion is: feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and/or visit prisoners. There is some ambiguity whether or not someone need do all of the list or just one or two of them. It seems that one may be enough. So a potential goat may shout out, “I did that one! I’m a sheep!”

Jesus is quoting Isaiah 58 almost word for word. Ezekiel 18 also has similar words. The prophets extoll the people to help the poor and unfortunate. Proverbs 19:17 says, “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full.”

Jesus is aware of the plight of the unfortunate. Jesus was hungry at times, especially in the wilderness. Jesus was thirsty, especially on the cross. And I saw Ben-Hur give Jesus a drink of water. Jesus, a stranger in Capernaum, was given a place to stay even though his home was in Nazareth. Jesus was clothed as Jesus never made his own clothing. To the best of our knowledge Jesus was never sick. Jesus was only a prisoner near the end and no one visited him. Jesus, as judge, knew very well the plight of the unfortunate.

Those favored on the Jesus’ right were unaware that they did any of those things for the unfortunate. They are reminded that when they did it for the least, they did it for Jesus. The ones on the left were also unaware of doing any of those things, because they did not do them.

The shocking thing about this to some may be that doctrine has nothing to do with eternal life. Being born again has no eternal benefits. Shocked religious people would find themselves on the left. They would be more shocked to see people who never set foot in a place worship on the right.

This begs the question of the importance, if any, of doctrine. Doctrine is important in developing a belief system. We can say we believe in Jesus, but what does that mean in connection with everything else? The answer is doctrine.

The point Jesus is making is that when we help another person in need, we are helping Jesus. This is incarnation (which is doctrine). When God took human form, a divine spark became part of all of us. There is a part of Jesus in all of us. When we rejoice with someone, we rejoice with Jesus. When we help someone, we are helping Jesus.

There is a danger in emphasizing this passage. I think there were some in seminary that fell into this trap. The trap is self-righteousness. If we feel superior to others because we are practitioners of Jesus' list of the righteous, we fall into the trap of self-righteousness. As I recall, I did note that some were particularly proud of their relationship with Matthew 25. I can visualize Jesus complimenting these people for their work in helping others, but adding, "You don't have to be a jerk about it."

On the Sermon on the Mount, earlier in Matthew, Jesus counsels humility. "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1)

Suzie was talking to someone at her place of work about the Thanksgiving baskets that were collected and given away last week. This person belongs to a much larger church than Trinity and that church does nothing as ambitious as Thanksgiving baskets. As a small parish, you do a lot. So, be proud, just not too proud.

This church is remarkable for its outreach ministries. When people were stopping by to pick up their boxes and turkeys, there were no TV news cameras recording for a "feel good" story. These gifts for others was done out of gratitude for what we have, for a concern to those in need, and without any desire for publicity.

The good news is, that in Jesus' time, the ratio of sheep to goats was ten to one. If we have helped others, we are members of the 90%! Rejoice in being at Jesus' right hand. You are not just helping another human being. You are

helping Jesus. If we're going to be judged, isn't it great to know that the one who makes the final decision is the one who loved us enough to die for us.

Text: **Matthew 25:31–46** (NRSV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family,^g you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me 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 nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just 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.”

^g Gk *these my brothers*#

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Mt 25:31–46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.