

Christ the King

Matthew 25:31 “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, 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.”

Ephesians 1:15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. **17** I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, **18** so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. **20** God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, **21** far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. **22** And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ezekiel 34:11 For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. **12** As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. **13** I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. **14** I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Psalm 100 ~ A Psalm of thanksgiving

- 1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
- 3 Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
- 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
- 5 For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen

It was another Christmas at the Corrigans. This year the special gift was—the flu. As I lay on the ground, staring at my in-laws bookcase, I noticed a book I had never seen before, *Bless me Father*, by Fr. Neil Boyd, the pseudonym of a Roman Catholic priest who served as the curate in a parish in London in 1950. The protagonist is Fr. Duddleswell, the parish priest. There are recurring characters in *Bless Me Father*, including the Anglican clergy.

The Anglicans and the Roman Catholic clergy are portrayed as brothers, as siblings. They protect each other when the outside world threatens, but when no one is looking, they might punch each other, and pull each other's hair, just like real siblings.

The story that I will recount is one of those sibling hair pulling-type stories. Fr. Duddleswell is looking unhappy as he reads a letter. He has been instructed by his Bishop to do something ecumenical. With the same resigned air as adopted by the French officer in Casablanca, who ordered his men to round up the usual suspects, Fr. Duddleswell instructs his curate, Fr. Boyd, to call up the Anglicans.

In the next scene, we see that the Anglicans have come over for a spot of tea. This time though, they are loaded for bear, they have come to tweak Fr. Duddleswell's tail.

"So, Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that you believe in Hell?"

Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course I do! For Holy Church says it is so!"

Anglicans: "And Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that you believe that there is a place of eternal torment and punishment?"

Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course I do! For Holy Church says it is so!"

With that the Anglicans grab their hats and coats, head for the door, and on their way out, spit out at Fr. Duddleswell "Sadist!"

As Fr. Boyd is helping Fr. Duddleswell clean up the wreckage of the tea, he decides to pursue the theological implications of this conversation a bit further.

Fr. Boyd, asks, "So, Fr. Duddleswell, is it true that we believe in Hell?"

Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course, we do, for Holy Church says it is so!"

Fr. Boyd: "And Fr. Duddleswell is it true that we believe that there is a place of eternal torment and punishment?"

Fr. Duddleswell: "Of course, we do, for Holy Church says it is so!"

Fr. Boyd: "And, so there are people there suffering in this place of torment and punishment for eternity?"

With that, Fr. Duddleswell puts down his dishes, turns around, and stares in shock at Fr. Boyd. "What?" says Fr. Duddleswell. "You actually think that there are people there? Are you insane?"

Using a Fr. Duddleswell-like perspective, let's examine the sheep and the goats. To get there, I will first reflect on my experience as a father. I recall that Connie and I grew up in a social milieu that believed spare the rod, spoil the child. And so when child number one, Charlotte came along, at an opportune time, we spanked her. The result was disgusting. Charlotte transformed herself into a bubbling mudpot of snot, mucous, tears and all sorts of disgusting effluence. This went on for hours, and so, Charlotte trained us not to spank her. It

was thoroughly unrewarding and counter productive. However, we figured Charlotte was unique, and so when child number two, Ben, came along, we tried spanking him. Well, Ben was different alright. He even had developed his own language and vocabulary. Spanking Ben sent him into insane bouts of rage in which he announced “You Whagooks you! I am going to lock you up in jail!” This would last for hours. Yes, spanking, Ben, was quite different, but, again a total exercise in futility. We hardly bothered spanking child number three, Emily, or child number four, Helen.

> So what we had on our hands was a flock of sheep, what I call carrot people. “Do the right thing, and I will buy you an ice cream cone.” “Ooh! I like ice cream! I will do the right thing.”

Reflecting on myself, I realize that I am more of an old goat, what I call a stick person. I am actually quite lazy. Sitting on the couch and doing nothing suits me. Trinkets and baubles do not interest me. What got me to bestir myself, and get off the couch was a mantra that was inscribed in my heart. “Work or die!” “Work or die!” It was the fear of negative consequences that motivated me. I was afraid that those who I held most dearly to me, would wither and die, if I did not get up and do what I had to do.

We have to remember that Jesus dwelt in our midst. He listens to us. He has inhabited our skin and flesh. He knows us inside and out. He knows that some of us are carrot people, sheep people. “Yo! Listen up carrot people! Do the right thing, and you get an ice cream cone!” “Oooh! I like ice cream cones! I think I will do the right thing.” “Yo! Listen up stick people! If you do not do the right thing, I will smack you!” “Oooh! I do not want to get smacked. I guess I will do the right thing.” Either way, the message will be nuanced in the way that we need to hear it, and we will be given the chance to do the right thing.

So, what does doing the right thing consist of? It seems fairly straight forward. Feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, clothe the naked, house the homeless, visit the sick and incarcerated. Well, it turns out that there is another commandment, somewhat hidden. The clue is in the words, “For whenever you did it for the least of them, you did it for me.”

I have a rare disease, Pityriasis Rubra Pilaris, PRP, Pretty Red People. At the height of its intensity, every joint screamed in agony and every ligament dried out. The edema turned me into the Michelin man, and is surprisingly painful. Shifting position sends water down the wrong way of the body’s one way streets that are not designed to withstand sudden flooding. The pain is excruciating, like withstanding minutes of bursts of machine gun fire.

Anecdotally, there is a 20% chance that the PRP sufferer will never go into remission. I recalled the philosopher Viktor Frankl, a concentration camp survivor, who found that those

who survived the concentration camps were the ones who could find meaningfulness in their suffering. And so I prayed:

Help me Jesus, help me. Jesus, I can really feel the pain that you felt. Thank you Jesus. Thank you for taking upon yourself the entire pain of the world, in order to release us from our pain. And Jesus, let my pain have meaning. Let me be One-d to you. Jesus, and just as you took upon the pain of others, lay someone else's pain upon me, and let them be released from their suffering. Let me be your instrument.

And as I prayed, people began to see something new in me. They came out of the wood works to feed me, to bring me gifts, to pray for me. They could see through me the face of Christ, and feed it. It turns out that the hidden commandment is that each and every one of us must take our turn in the gutter. Each and every one of us must become an opportunity for others to fulfill their Matthew 25 ministry.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, We thank you for the gift of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Christ our King, who laid out His hands upon the Cross, and took upon himself the entire pain of the world in order to save us. We ask, Heavenly Father, that you so thin us out, that others can see in us, the face of Christ, and feed Him. We ask for this so that we can be instruments of your peace, the means by which others can fulfill their Matthew 25 ministry, and so bring about the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Amen.