

THY KINGDOM COME

Sermon for the Last Sunday of the Church Year, 2017

Matthew 25:31-46

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Matthew 25:31-46: ³¹ **“When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those at His right, ‘Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created! ³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me into your homes; ³⁶ naked, and you gave Me something to wear; sick, and you looked after Me; in prison, and you visited Me.’**

³⁷ **“Then the righteous ones will ask Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You a drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You into our homes, or naked and give You something to wear? ³⁹ When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’**

⁴⁰ **“Then the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I tell you, anything you have done for one of My brothers here, even the least important of them, you have done for Me.’**

⁴¹ **“Then He will say to those at His left, ‘Go away from Me, you cursed ones, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! ⁴² For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; thirsty, and you did not give Me a drink; ⁴³ a stranger, and you did not take Me into your homes;**

naked, and you did not give Me anything to wear; sick and in prison, and you did not look after Me.'

⁴⁴ **"Then they also will ask, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not help You?'"**

⁴⁵ **"Then He will answer them, 'Truly, I tell you, anything you have not done for one of these, even the least important of them, you have not done for Me.'**

⁴⁶ **"Then these will go away to everlasting punishment, but the righteous ones to everlasting life."**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, "*Thy Kingdom come.*" We pray this so often that we don't even think about what we are really asking. We are asking for the reign of God the Father to come to us and we don't really give it a lot of thought. How often do you give thanks to God that you can pray for His reign to come among us as a *comforting* thing and not as a cause of terror?

Consider Adam and Eve's response when God came to them. ⁸ *At the time of the day when there was a breeze, the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden, and they hid from the presence of the LORD God among the trees in the garden.* ⁹ *Then the LORD God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?"* ¹⁰ *The man said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked. So I hid,"* (Genesis 3:8-10) Adam and Eve were terrified of God because they had sinned. They feared His judgment. After all, the Psalmist reminds us, "*You are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you,*" (Psalm 5:4). The coming of God's kingdom was the last thing they wanted.

When we examine ourselves in light of the Ten Commandments, we learn that we sin daily and deserve punishment here on this earth and forever in hell. It seems as though we should be terrified to pray the words, "*Thy Kingdom*

come.” Why did Jesus teach us to pray in such a way if the coming of the Kingdom of God means the coming of judgment?

God’s actions in the Bible teaches that there is another way that He can come, a way that brings comfort and confidence, a way that removes fear and despair.

At one time God came to Jacob in a dream. He came down a ladder and promised, *“Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you,”* (Gen. 28:15). He appeared to Moses in the burning bush and said, *“I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain,”* (Ex. 3:12). Later on, Moses comforted the people of Israel with these words, *“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed,”* (Deut. 31:8). God spoke words of comfort to His people through the Prophet Ezekiel, *“My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people,”* (Ezekiel 37:27).

So, it seems that the coming of the Kingdom of God can cause two completely different reactions. The first reaction is one of *terror*. I am a wretched sinner and deserve God’s righteous, eternal wrath. The second reaction is one of *comfort, reassurance, and confidence*. God is with me. Now I am safe. We see these two reactions in today’s Gospel.

Perhaps you have noticed that the Gospels for these past few Sundays have been working their way through Jesus’ teaching concerning the Last Day. There was the Parable of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins. Then there was the Parable of the Talents. Today, we heard about sheep and goats. In each case, there are those who rejoice that the reign of God has come, and there are those who despair at its coming. What is the difference?

Our Lord Jesus Christ has an ability that we do not have. He can look into the human heart. It is as He spoke through His prophet Jeremiah, *“I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways,*

according to the fruit of his deeds,” (Jeremiah 17:10). In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches that it is as easy for Him to judge the heart as it is for a shepherd to tell the difference between a sheep and a goat. In fact, today’s Gospel teaches us that Jesus knows you better than you know yourself.

Jesus will hand out two verdicts on the Last Day. In today’s Gospel, Jesus said that He would place some people to His right and others to His left. Since Jesus already knows the heart, there is no questioning, no testimony, no presenting of evidence. There is only the verdict and the sentence.³² **All nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**³³ **He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left.**

The first verdict is for those on His right. The King will say to those on his right, **‘Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created!’** Those on the right enter the Judge’s home with a verdict of *forgiven*.

Notice a few things about the Judge’s statement: First of all, note that the blessing flows from the Father. It is not something that these people work up for themselves. Second of all, note that this is an inheritance. You don’t work for an inheritance. You receive an inheritance because someone put you in the will. You cannot earn an inheritance.

Finally, note that God prepared this outcome before any of us were even born. The kingdom is prepared **from the time when the world was created**. This tells us that this eternal kingdom was God’s will for these people from the very beginning.

The second verdict is for those on His left.⁴¹ **“Then He will say to those at His left, ‘Go away from Me, you cursed ones, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!’** Those on the left receive the verdict of guilty. The sentence is **everlasting fire**.

In this instance the source of the curse remains un-named. The cursed condition is simply a characteristic of these people.

Secondly, notice that this condemnation was not prepared for people. It was **prepared for the Devil and his angels**. People end up in eternal fire only because they reject God's salvation. If they are arrogant enough to judge God and find Him offensive, then the eternal fire is the only alternative. There is no other place to spend eternity.

As the Judge welcomes those on His right into eternal bliss, He recalls the work that His salvation has produced in their lives. Now here is the important point of the story. The sheep don't remember any of it. The list of the works is a total surprise to the sheep. **'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You a drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You into our homes, or naked and give You something to wear? ³⁹ When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?'** They haven't got a clue.

On the other hand, those on the left are angry that Jesus gives a similar list of things that they have NOT done. They have kept a careful record of their good works and they know for a fact that Jesus did NOT present Himself for their help at any time. Even as they stand before the Judge of all things, they maintain that they have lived a life of good works and high moral character.

The point is that those who inherit the eternal kingdom do not look to their own good works for their salvation. Instead, the Holy Spirit finds dead souls and brings them to life through the proclamation of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit keeps those souls alive through that same proclamation of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins. The proclamation of our crucified and risen Lord and Saviour leads the Christian, carries the Christian, and follows the Christian. The Holy Spirit causes us to relax in Christ.

Good works are the result of the salvation that we already have. The Holy Spirit inspired the Prophet Isaiah to write, "*We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away,*" (Is. 64:6). So even our best most righteous deeds are still sinful before God, but Jesus Christ redeemed our deeds with His suffering and death on the cross. It is Christ on

the cross who makes our deeds righteous. Those who have had their good deeds sanctified by Jesus, focus on Jesus and not on their works. Therefore, they notice their good works about as much as they notice that their fingernails are growing.

Jesus warned us and said, *“Be careful not to perform your righteous deeds before other people, in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*² *Therefore, when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be praised by other people! Truly, I tell you, they have their reward in full,”* (Matthew 6:1-2). “They have received their reward in full.” That is one of the saddest statements in the Sermon on the Mount. They have traded away their eternal joy for the temporary praise of man.

You are pleasing to God, not because of what you do or don't do. You are pleasing to God because of what Jesus did for you. Jesus lived a life that met God's perfect standard. He died a death that paid our sin debt in full. He rose from the dead as a sign that our Father in Heaven accepted His work for us. Your salvation has been paid in full. Relax in the Lord.

As you find your comfort in the Lord, you will be among those who can pray, *“Thy kingdom come,”* and look forward to the day. You can take comfort in the promise of Jesus, *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age,* (Matt. 28:20). You can look forward in eager expectation to the day when you hear a loud voice from the throne saying, *“He will dwell with them, they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God,”* (Revelation 21:3).

While you wait for that day, you will produce good works. These works do you absolutely no good, but they are precious to your neighbour. God will accomplish His will in this world through your works. Confess your sins - even those righteous deeds that are actually polluted garments. Receive the forgiveness of Jesus. Live for your neighbour. Don't waste time trying to measure your good works. You don't need them. You are heir to the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world because of what Jesus

Christ has freely done for you. Rejoice that God wants to dwell with you. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR

Lord our God, we praise You because You are the Rock of our salvation. You control the forces of nature in Your creation. Your name is holy; from one generation to another. You show mercy to those who trust and fear You. You bring down mighty kings from their thrones, and lift up the lowly. You fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away with empty hands. We thank and praise You that You have rescued us from the power of darkness, and brought us safely into the kingdom of Your dear Son. By His death You have set us free from our sins; by His resurrection You have given us the sure hope of eternal life with You.

Increase the power of the Holy Spirit in us, that we may be able to escape from the corruption of this world, and avoid Your righteous wrath, that we may live as people whom You have graciously enlightened, in ways that are worthy of Jesus, our Saviour. Grant that, through Your Word, we may grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, know Your will better, and live as You desire. Use the difficulties in our lives to strengthen our faith and love. Make us wiser and more patient, and rich in brotherly kindness and compassion. Fill our hearts with constant awareness of Your generous love, that, as children of light, we may praise You through our lives.

Arouse Your Church, O Lord, that it may remember Your continual goodness. Cleanse, strengthen, and guide it, that it may indeed be Your holy people, as lights that shine in this world's darkness. Give it pastors who are faithful shepherds of Your flock. Put Your Word on their lips, that truth may triumph, and new life may increase among us.

Bless the preaching of the Gospel, that it may bear fruit and spread rapidly throughout the world. Move more and more to turn from their idolatry, rebellion, love of pleasure, and every other evil, and to look to Jesus Christ for life and light.

Look in compassion on the nations of the world. Exert Your gracious power in our land, that we may obey Your voice. Correct what is wrong in our society, and keep us safe from our enemies. Give our leaders wisdom and courage to rule justly, to uphold good and put down the evil, so that true worship and godliness may flourish. Bless our homes. Give all parents grace to lead their children to Jesus by the example of their own faith and life. Keep our homes free of all strife and conflict.

We ask for Your mercy for all who are sick and in need. Support them with Your strength, and deliver them by Your goodness, that they may rejoice in Your fatherly wisdom and care.

Grant that, equipped with the armour that You supply, we may be ready for the coming day of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it may not overtake us like a thief in the night. Grant that we may finally share in Your eternal kingdom of light, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Last Sunday of the Church Year

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹ For this is what the Lord GOD has said: “Look! I Myself shall search for My sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd cares for his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I shall look after My sheep. I shall rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy and very gloomy day. ¹³ I shall bring them out from the peoples, gather them from the countries, and bring them to their own land. I shall be a

shepherd to them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the land. ¹⁴ I shall look after them in good pasture, and their grazing-land will be on the mountain-heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing-land and graze in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I Myself shall shepherd My sheep, and I Myself shall let them lie down,” declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ “I shall search for the lost ones, bring back those that have been scattered, bandage the injured ones, and strengthen the sick ones.

I shall destroy the ones that are fat and the strong. I shall shepherd them with justice...

²⁰ Therefore this is what the Lord GOD has said to them: "Look! I, yes, I Myself, shall judge between a fat sheep and a lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with your sides and shoulders, and butt all the weak animals away with your horns until you have scattered them to the outside, ²² I shall save My flock, so that they may not be something to plunder any more. I shall judge between one sheep and another.

²³ "I shall appoint one Shepherd over them, My Servant David, and He will shepherd them. He will take care of them and He Himself will be their Shepherd. ²⁴ I Myself, the LORD, shall be their God, and My Servant David will be the Prince among them. I Myself, the LORD, have spoken.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

²⁰ However, now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. ²²

For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³

However, each one in his own turn: Christ is the firstfruits. After that, when He comes, those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God, the Father, after He has put an end to all dominion, authority, and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until God has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be brought to an end is death. ²⁷ For "He has put all things under His feet." However, when He says, "All things have been put under Him," it is clear that this does not include the One who has put every-thing under Christ. ²⁸ However, when all things have been put under Him, then the Son Himself will also be put under the One who has put all things under Him, so that God may be all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46

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a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.³³ He will have the sheep stand at His right but the goats at His left.³⁴ Then the King will say to those at His right, 'Come, you whom My Father has blessed! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the time when the world was created!³⁵ For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me into your homes;³⁶ naked, and you gave Me something to wear; sick, and you looked after Me; in prison, and you visited Me.'

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