

The Second to Last Sunday of the Church Year – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Matthew 25:31-46: “Are You Ready for *Inheritance Day*?”
November 13/14, 2021 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Holy and righteous God, in mercy You became the Son of Man to be a gracious Judge to us. Grant us to live our life here on earth in true faith and love, and to stand with all Your people at Your right hand on the Day of Your glory. Amen. (Laache, *Book of Family Prayer*, p. 35)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the twenty-fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me.’ / “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’ / “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.’ / “Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ / “Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ / “Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ / “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who in His mercy does not give us what we deserve, and in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, dear fellow redeemed:

You could see it coming. She wasn't as mobile as she used to be. The yard that she had kept so meticulously was beginning to get overgrown. So you offered to help her. You would be happy to mow her lawn, shovel her sidewalk, do any odd jobs she needed done. That's what neighbors do. And she was always very grateful. She offered to pay you, but you told her it was easy to run over and take care of things since you are outside anyway. So she paid you with smiles and

waves and thank yous and fresh-baked cookies. You got close to your neighbor and she got close to you.

But her health declined still more. The time came for her to move from her home to receive more care. You continued to keep up her lawn and visit her in the nursing home. You were not surprised when you received the call that she had died, but you were sad—a good neighbor and a good friend gone.

A couple weeks later, your phone rang. It was your neighbor's lawyer asking you to be present for the reading of her will. That was a surprise! It was even more surprising to find no one else in attendance on the appointed day. The lawyer began to read. Your neighbor left a message of love and thankfulness for all your kindnesses. Then she proceeded to say that everything she owned she was giving to you. Unknown to anyone around her—including you—she had a significant fortune. Just like that, ten million dollars was yours!

You were in shock. Sure, you had helped her, but not ten million dollars' worth! You helped her out of kindness, not expecting anything in return. This was truly humbling. In fact, you felt some guilt. You wished you had done more for her, spent more time with her. Your effort was so small compared to this massive gift. It was a totally incomprehensible and undeserved inheritance.

This is how it is with the inheritance our heavenly Father gives us. We don't deserve it. We haven't earned it. But He freely gives it. Notice how when Jesus names all the wonderful things the righteous do, the righteous wonder when they have done all these things. In their estimation, they haven't done anything. And Jesus replies, *"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me."*

Every good thing that we do out of love for God and for one another is counted as a good work before God. Many of these things are small in our sight: preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning the house, pitching in to help our co-workers, sharing a kind word, encouraging the hurting, praying for those in need. Jesus sees it all. He delights in it, as though it were done directly for Him.

That is comforting to hear. But then we think about all the times we have not done good. We didn't want to change our plans to help someone else. We complained when a hurting soul wanted more of our time than we wanted to give. We decided not to reach out to someone who had experienced loss because we weren't sure what to say. We accepted all the praise for a job well done, but we passed the blame for a job done poorly. Would we treat Jesus this way? He said to the unrighteous, *"as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."*

The scene in today's Gospel is Judgment Day, when the Son of Man comes in His glory and sits on His glorious throne. "Judgment Day" has a scary sound to it. It sounds like a dark day, a day we would rather avoid. Jesus says that *"on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak"* (Mat. 12:36). And in words that are included in the Athanasian Creed, He says that on the last day all the dead will come out of their tombs—*"those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment"* (Joh. 5:29).

Are you ready to stand before the holy Son of God and give an account for every careless word you have spoken? Are you ready to give an account of all you have done? This is where some think they can balance the ledger themselves. "Let's see: I said something that wasn't very nice, but then I made up for it by giving some compliments. I used to be more selfish, but now I am generous with my gifts. I ignored my neighbor once when he needed help, but I have helped many others since then."

But there is no excuse for our bad behavior, and there is no making up for our own wrongs. Trying to justify ourselves puts us in the camp of the unrighteous who unsuccessfully argue that if they had seen Jesus in need, they would have certainly helped Him. If we think we can stand before Jesus and plead the cause of our own righteousness, we will be condemned to eternal punishment.

So what hope do we have? If we can't make things right with God, how can we possibly gain eternal life? We have eternal life because God made things right with us. It is strange for us to hear Jesus list all the good things the righteous have done. Compared with Jesus, the righteous really haven't done a thing! He is the one who gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. He is the one who welcomed strangers and treated them kindly. He is the one who helped the sick and needy. He perfectly fulfilled the law of love toward His neighbors. He did not fail anyone in any way.

And that is the key to the words that Jesus speaks about the righteous. They are not righteous because of what *they* have done. They are righteous because of what *He* has done. Our righteousness comes from Him. It is bestowed on us by Him. Romans 4:4-5 says, "*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.*" We have not earned righteousness by our own works; we receive righteousness by faith in Jesus.

His righteousness is complete. It does not require anything from us. He has fully kept the law for us. Romans 10:4, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" The gift of His righteousness is reflected in His words to the sheep at the right of His throne. "*Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*"

Jesus says that the righteous are those who are blessed by God the Father. They are the ones who are credited with Jesus' righteousness. They are the ones who are cleansed by His holy blood. These are invited to inherit the Father's kingdom. To leave no question how the righteous obtain this inheritance, Jesus says that "*the kingdom [has been] prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" If the inheritance has been prepared from the foundation of the world, it can't be something the righteous have earned. The kingdom of heaven is a gift. It is like the ten million dollar inheritance that you do not deserve.

This eternal inheritance is yours. Jesus' death on the cross secured it, and His resurrection from the grave verifies it. The righteous are all those who deny their own righteousness and trust in Jesus only. The unrighteous are those who rely on their own efforts and expect God to reward them for their good behavior. You are righteous by faith in your Savior. You do not lack anything because He did everything for you.

He will not make a mistake on the last day. He will not send you to punishment. Every careless word you have spoken, every sinful thing you have done, has been blotted out by Jesus' blood. Through Your Baptism, Jesus' forgiveness was applied to you, and His perfect righteousness was placed over you. You are clean and holy in God's sight.

As His righteous one, you reflect His righteousness by what you say and do. You help and serve your neighbor not because you are trying to build up righteousness before God. You help and serve your neighbor because you *are* righteous. And all those righteous words and actions which are possible only because of what Jesus has done for you, He counts them as having been done for Him!

So we do not look toward Judgment Day with dread. We look toward Judgment Day with confidence and anticipation. On that day we will be judged right with God by faith in Jesus. Jesus tells us that on the day of His glorious return, we should not cower in fear. You and I should "*straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*" (Luk. 21:28).

Judgment Day for us is *Inheritance* Day. It is the day when all that our merciful Father has promised us, all that is already ours by faith, we will enjoy in all its fullness. In Jesus' holy presence, we will not be thinking about anything we have done. We will praise Him for everything He has freely given to us – an "*inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [us]*" (1Pe. 1:4) – to enjoy for all eternity.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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