

Christ the King Sunday – 2020
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Matthew 25:31-46

Judgment Day will be familiar to you. You will not be surprised when you stand before the Lord in all His glory. Oh, it may come at a time that you do not expect. That is quite true. You may very well be shocked out of your gourd to see the majesty of the Almighty, in that you have never seen it in its raw form before. Your senses will be on overload, your pulse rate will be through the roof, and your mind will blow but there will be something very familiar about the proceedings. Your life will be the familiar part. It is your life that will be judged. God will not pull a foreign rabbit out of His hat when you stand before Him – it will be all you and it will be familiar (it is your life after all).

On Judgment Day, when you stand before Christ the King on His glorious throne, your life will be in view. What He says, goes. There will be no appealing to a Supreme Court after the Lord pronounces His judgment. There is no court above Him. Jesus says that He is going to divide people, like a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. On that day, every human being will want to be a sheep. It goes well with the sheep. It goes nightmarish for the goats. Eternal punishment is nightmarish. Judgment does not go well for the goats. I suspect, I do not know but I suspect, that all of us will have great clarity in regard to the lives we have lived, our interaction with God and His Word, our devotion to what is good, our affinity for what is evil, our regard or lack of it for our neighbor. Clarity; as much as He knows us, we will know ourselves. We will be unable to shove down into our subconscious the things we shove down there now. As He judges us, it will be familiar.

Jesus tells this judgment parable to get you dialed in. He provides the answer key before He gives the test – pretty great, right? Better sit up and pay attention. The parable has one obvious point. How you treat your neighbor is pretty dang important. How you treat those who you are walking through life with – fellow human beings who are always around you – God places a high value on that. It's simple, really. God puts Himself in places you don't expect. He was born in a manger, a lowly cattle stall. The angels told the shepherds where the Son of God lay because they would never have dreamed of looking there for God's Son. But faith, born of that Word, found Christ just where it was proclaimed that He would be. Christ hides Himself in simple bread, simple wine. He hides Himself there (His body and blood) in order to be found. Faith finds Him where He has promised to be. We receive Him in the water of Baptism. We receive Him in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. He gives Himself to us in those places.

Christ hides Himself somewhere else. Not so much in order to give Himself to you (though that is true), but for you to give yourself to Him. Where does Christ hide Himself? In your neighbor. Strictly speaking, in our parable, what made sheep sheep was the fact that they helped out those who needed them. Remember, you want to be a sheep. No doubt about it, Jesus identifies with your neighbor (present tense) – especially when he or she is in need. “I was hungry and you fed Me, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was naked and lonely and a stranger and totally sick and you blessed Me when you clothed me, when you befriended Me, when you nursed Me.” Maybe it's just me but I'd be totally stoked to hear that I had done such a thing the Lord who

was crucified for my sin (who loved me and gave Himself up for me). I totally want to do that for Him. But I'd have to be honest and say: "No way, Lord. Sorry, but I never did such a thing for you."

That's just what the sheep in the parable did. They were honest, humble, bewildered. "When?" When did we see you hungry and feed you? And this is the jewel, this is a priceless Christian truth: "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it for one of these the least of my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:40). The goats are another story – the opposite story. "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). When I was hungry you didn't. When I was thirsty, you didn't. When I was a stranger, you didn't. I was there in need and you didn't lift a finger. "As you did not do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me" (Matthew 25:45).

There are those you have failed to help. There is aid you have left ungiven. There is love you have neglected to convey. You have not loved your neighbor as yourself. The world is doing a brilliant job of making goats. Vain philosophy, ego-centric twaddle, materialism, radical autonomy, victimhood – the unbelieving world is cranking out goats on a 24-7 industrial scale. Universities, the rubbish on tele, the seeds of divisiveness that are being sown all around us – the effect on our souls is to make goatish behavior the norm, the expected. We are different. This parable brings you face to face with an unpleasant truth. As you have disregarded your neighbor, you have disregarded the Lord Christ. You are all guilty. As am I. You could avoid repenting. You could avoid examining your ill behavior, what reeks of selfishness and pride and apathy toward those who need you and you specifically. You could soft-peddle the fact that Christ has called you to a radical allegiance to Him – above all things, most especially above allegiance to yourself. You could avoid asking how what you are doing is affecting those near to you because maybe you prefer being a goat and you're going to keep some "goatness" because, hey, nobody's perfect. "And I will show you a still more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

He saw you. God ventured into this domain to make you His neighbor, you specifically. He saw you. In your hunger, unable to feed yourself with the bread of life and He came to feed you – with His death and resurrection, with love, with heaven and joy – He came into our flesh to feed you with Himself. For the sheep the Lamb has bled. He saw you in your poverty, your nakedness (truly naked and alone in your shame and your sin), He saw you and came to you to give you His righteousness, a robe of royal dignity. He saw you and there was nothing pleasant about you and He loved you to the full. He willed to die in order to make you His eternal neighbor. He bore your wretchedness on the holy cross. He bore the coldness of your heart, the apathy of your heart, the insincerity of your heart. As He bore it, He suffered what you deserve. A goat's punishment came upon Him and He cried out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Your goatness; He took it away (2 Corinthians 5:21). And He has filled you with His nature (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Here is His promise: "If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will produce much fruit" (John 15:5). His life *is* in you. He is the vine and you are the branch and how He loves His neighbor is in you. You are a sheep and you show yourself to be a sheep. Here is His promise: "God is at work in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:13). God's word does not return empty and that word is at work in you. You are a sheep and you show yourself to

belong to Him. Here is His promise: “Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). You are the sheep of Christ. You are the sheep of Christ the King. The Day of Judgment will be familiar to you. It is not only your life that will be on display, but the Lord’s life – the crucified King who has claimed you as His own. His life is familiar to you. That life is present, here. He and He alone makes us His sheep. Our Shepherd shares His life with us. We hear His voice. He calls us by name. His voice is familiar. What does it say? “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).