

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 25:31-46
November 18th, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When Did We?

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our society justice usually means getting the verdict or outcome that you desire. We hear it all the time. Somebody says, “We have gotten justice” whether that outcome is right or wrong. But true justice is when the righteous are rewarded with freedom and the wicked receive the due punishment coming to them, regardless of who they are. It doesn’t matter if they are rich or poor, popular or unpopular. True justice frees the innocent and condemns the guilty.

In the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Matthew we see the Lord’s justice and mercy. The King separates the goats from the sheep. We see our Lord’s justice in this because the righteous receive their reward of an eternal life in Heaven and the wicked goats receive condemnation in the eternal fires of Hell. Their judgment is based solely on the evidence presented. The evidence is the works they did in this life.

The righteous sheep gave the Lord food when He was hungry and drink when He was thirsty. They welcomed Him into their homes even though He was a stranger. They gave Him clothes when He was naked. And they visited Him when He was wrongfully put in prison. The wicked goats did none of these things. Therefore, the Lord in His justice rewards the sheep with eternal life and the goats with *“everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”*

So then here we have a Gospel that puts our salvation on our works—what we did or did not do. Or is it? For, our Lord + Jesus in telling this parable relates that both the sheep and the goats cry out for justice. The sheep ask for justice because they do not remember doing any of the works claimed by the King. Therefore, in their minds they cannot be the righteous sheep that the King thinks they are. “When did we” do these things? In their minds they never did any of the things required of them by the King.

The same is true of the goats, they demand justice, too. However, they clearly think that they have been doing all the things that the King demanded of them. “When did we” not do these things? In their minds they were always doing good works. They were always doing what was required of them.

So then, if our salvation is based upon our good works, or our condemnation is based upon our lack of doing them, justice would demand that the roles of the sheep and the goats be switched.

Therefore, salvation must be dependent on something else. Salvation for the sheep and condemnation for the goats depends on the works of the Lord + Jesus Christ. The sheep, even though they are not aware of the good works they are doing, still do them because they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Those who are baptized into the Name of the Lord bear His works; they are clothed with the righteousness of Christ through their trust in the promises given in Holy Baptism. So that on the Last Day the King will only see the Lord + Jesus Christ's works and merits in the sheep.

The goats, however, because they do not believe or trust on the Lord + Jesus, will not be clothed with His righteousness. Since they are not baptized into His Name, they will not bear His works and merits. Therefore, they will have to be judged according to their own works and merits. And since our keeping of the Law is always flawed; since we are constantly breaking the Law of God, or failing to do the tenets of the Law, if we are judged according to the Law, we will share the fate of the goats from the parable today.

So then, we see our Lord's justice. We see Him rewarding those who through faith are clothed in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus with eternal life. And we see those who on account of their unbelief demand to be judged according to their own works and receive everlasting punishment. Sadly, this latter group—the goats—thinks they have done the good works necessary to receive the reward of Heaven. How true is this in our own society? The works of man are praised by the world. When somebody does good works in this society; when somebody is called "a good person." Then our society judges him as worthy of inheriting eternal life in Heaven.

However, when people who bear the name of Christian do things that are contrary to the Law—when they commit sins—the world chastises them for not living as a Christian should and our society condemns him as unworthy of Heaven. This is the justice of the world. But thanks be to God that this is not true justice—this is not the justice of the Lord God. For our Lord God judges us according to our faith. We are justified by faith. Faith clings to the works and merits of Christ. Faith clings to the promises of the Lord God which declare that salvation is found in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus Christ alone.

For the Christian, our lives our lived each day like the sheep in the parable. We see our deeds that we do, and know that they do not measure up; that we are not worthy to be called Christians or deserve to merit eternal life based upon our works—upon our keeping of the Law. We do, however, cling to our Lord + Jesus in faith. We trust in His righteousness. We trust that His righteousness will cover our unrighteousness.

The unbeliever trusts in his own works for salvation, and no matter how good of a person he is it will never be enough. Just like in the parable, the goats could not believe that their good works were not enough. They cried out for justice. But justice was already served, because they received the punishment that comes from trusting in one's own works for salvation.

The sheep, however, in trusting in the works of Christ for their salvation, do not even think they have done anything worthy of eternal life. But they have done them, for faith in Christ produces works. The Holy Ghost stirs up our hearts to do good works on account of the faith that He created in us. Just as the Collect for the Day prays. We pray that the Holy Ghost might stir up in us a desire to live holy lives, which is done through faith in the promises of the Lord, so that we might inherit eternal life and dwell with our Lord + Jesus forever hereafter.

Our Lord's justice then is not based on the same principle that our society bases justice. Justice is not getting the desired outcome that you desire. If justice was according to the way of our world, believers would be condemned (as they are routinely by this world and society), and unbelievers would be declared the holy ones according to their works (as is also done persistently in our society). But our

Lord's justice rightly rewards the righteous, those who trust in His works and merits, with eternal life with Him and all the holy angels and all the saints who have gone before us. And His justice rightly condemns those who trust in their own good deeds for their salvation to be punished with an everlasting punishment in the eternal fires prepared for the devil and his angels.

So then, this parable from the Evangelist St. Matthew by our Lord + Jesus contains both a stark warning for us to not trust in our works. But it also carries a wonderful promise that through our trust in our Lord + Jesus we will inherit an eternal life with Him and His angels. This warning and promise is for all nations, for all nations will be gathered together on that Last Day when the Son of Man comes in His glory and sits on the throne of His glory to judge both the quick and the dead in true justice and mercy. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!