

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 25:31-46
November 17th, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Assuredly, I Say to You

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 Almighty, Eternal and Merciful God, Who by Thy beloved Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, hast established the kingdom of grace for us, that we might believe the forgiveness of our sins, in Thy holy Church on Earth, since Thou art a God Who hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: We beseech Thee, graciously forgive us all our sins, through the same, Thy Son Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

How often when we have a bad thing or several bad things happen to us that we say to ourselves, "I do not deserve this."? We feel that we have been slighted by the circumstances. It has to be unfair. We are after all basically good people. Or, so we think. The truth of the matter is, however, that when we have bad things happen to us that we do deserve them. In fact, we deserve much worse. On account of our sinfulness and disobedience to the Law of God we are worthy of only the Lord God's eternal wrath and displeasure. Whatever good works we think we may do to earn the title of Christian are not going to wash away the stick and stain of sin that dwells within us.

It is only through the grace and mercy of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ that we have any worth. It is His works and merits that are credited to us. It is His perfect obedience to the Law of God that imparts to righteousness. It is His suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross that pays the punishment that we deserve. Only when we cling to our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ and His works and merits, in faith, do we have hope of salvation. This is His desire for us. He desires that all men be saved. As St. Peter writes in the Epistle reading for today, our Lord is "*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*" Our Lord + Jesus is longsuffering toward us and all mankind, waiting patiently for all who would turn to Him in faith and be saved.

In the Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew our Lord tells us what is to take place on the Last Day. We have two groups. There are sheep and goats. Both of these groups are told news that they did not believe that they deserved. The sheep did not believe that they were deserving of the grace that our Lord and King, + Jesus, was rewarding them with, because they only saw the sins that they commit daily and often. The goats did not believe that they were worthy of the condemnation that was being meted out to them, because they were basically good people. Their works were most likely praised by our world and society when they were alive, as it is so often the case. The world loves philanthropy, but good works without faith are dead works.

Our Lord + Jesus, the Son of Man, when He sits on His throne of glory will divide the world into sheep and goats. There is no middle group. You are either saved or you are not. This Gospel can be

frightening to us, because we can imagine ourselves lumped in with the goats, because our works toward our fellowman, are at times lacking. This is exactly the attitude of the sheep. When our Lord and Savior, + Jesus Christ addresses the sheep, and tells them of all the good works that they did, they do not believe it. "When did we do these things?" In this Gospel we see our Lord's mercy. His plan of salvation has existed since the beginning of the world. He has planned for our salvation since the beginning, even before we were made. His plan of salvation was not that we should do enough good works to tally up to the mark of salvation. No, His plan of salvation was for Him to come down from Heaven and do the works necessary for our salvation Himself, and even pay the penalty that we incurred.

The sheep know that their works do not save them, because this is what faith teaches—the faith that is created and sustained in us by the Holy Ghost working through the means of grace. Our faith clings to the works and merits of the Christ. The sheep trusted in the works and merits of Christ, too. "When did we do these good works You talk about?" The works were done by the Lord + Jesus, but on account of faith dwelling in the sheep, those works were credited to them. Their works are the works that the Lord + Jesus did on their behalf. They bear His righteousness, through their Holy Baptism, when they were washed and cleansed away of sin, and given the new robes of our Lord's righteousness. This is why the Lord + Jesus, the Son of Man, calls the sheep, "Blessed of My Father." They were blessed by the Father when He put His Holy Ghost on them at their Holy Baptism, confirming their salvation through water and word.

Therefore, they now bear the works of the Lord + Jesus through faith. But faith does one other thing. It not only credits us with the Lord's works, but produces the desire to do good works for our fellowman. These good works happen naturally. A good tree must produce good fruit. A righteous person, who bears the righteousness of the Christ, must produce righteous works. This what the Lord's plan was to offering up His life and a ransom for mankind, so that through faith they might lay claim to His works and merits. He did this for us all so that we could inherit an eternal life. This is after all what our Lord says in the Gospel reading, "*inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" Our Lord + Jesus has prepared a Kingdom for you. He prepared it before the foundation of the world. It is His intention that we inherit this eternal Kingdom of Heaven. This is how great the grace and mercy of our Lord is. This is how much He loves us, His creation.

This is also why He addresses the sheep first. He finally gets to give the sheep the reward that He has been waiting to give them since before the foundation of the world. But as much as He delights in giving an inheritance to the sheep, it pains Him to hand out the sentence of punishment to the goats. The goats had trusted in their own righteousness. This is why they think it so incredulous that they have not done any good works. "What do you mean we have not done these things?" They were good people in their own minds. But good works apart from faith in the Christ, are dead works. They avail nothing. Therefore, the Son of Man as He sits on His throne of glory must hand out the punishment.

But notice what He says about the punishment. The reward for the sheep was determined before the foundation of the world. So too, the everlasting fire. But the everlasting fire was not prepared for mankind. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. The Lord God really is patient with His creation, even though we are not worthy of it, even as St. Peter wrote in His Epistle. He wants all men to be saved and come to Him in faith, and put on His righteousness and bear His works and merits, and be saved. The everlasting fire was not prepared for mankind, it was prepared for the devil and his angels. This is why it pains the Lord + Jesus to mete out the punishment that was not meant for the goats. But, through their unbelief and refusal to call + Jesus, the Lord, they earned the punishment that they are getting.

Let us therefore come to our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ—come before His throne of glory—in repentance and faith. Let us acknowledge our lack of good works, all the times when we could have

helped our neighbor, but did not. For when we help our fellowman, we are helping our Lord + Jesus, for we are all His creation, and our neighbor is the embodiment of our Lord. We show love for our Lord God, when we love and do good things for our neighbor. So, let us first acknowledge that we fail to help our neighbor when we should. But, secondly, let us turn to our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ in faith and cling to His works and merits.

The sheep will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven prepared for them before the foundation of the world. We are unworthy of this honor, on account of our sins. But the Lord makes us worthy through His plan of salvation—His coming down from Heaven to put on our flesh, and save us through His works and merits. We have foretaste of the feast of Heaven every time we come to this altar to receive His Body and Blood in bread and wine. In this meal we are reminded of His sacrifice for us, and given forgiveness of our sins. This meal is our right by virtue of our Holy Baptism. We were washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, all our sins were washed away, and we have been clothed with the righteousness of the Christ. Our works are His works. Let us cling in faith to Him and what He has done for us. Let us cling in faith to the plan of salvation that was made before the foundation of the world. The plan that gives us an eternal inheritance in Heaven with all the saints and angels. May the Lord God Almighty grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who wilt come again in majesty to judge the quick and the dead, and call forth all who sleep in the graves, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation: we beseech Thee to be gracious unto us, and to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Thee, and, having been found acceptable in Thy sight, may on the last day be raised up to life everlasting, inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, and give Thee glory and praise, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!