

The Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 25:31-46
November 19th, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Michael and All Angels Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Augusta, GA
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Inasmuch As Ye Did It

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when saw we Thee hungry, and fed Thee? or athirst, and gave Thee drink? And when saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? And when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?’ And the King shall answer and say unto them, ‘Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me.’”

Prayer in Pulpit before 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.

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

When we come to the end of the Church’s year we are inundated with a lot of “doom and gloom.” Last week we heard about the Church experiencing persecution from false teachers infiltrating the ranks of the Church. They will lead many away from the truth, as has happened in many corners of the Church. Next week we will hear about the foolish virgins who do not bring with them enough oil in their lamps, and because of it—because they try to buy their salvation from those who sell—they are locked out of the wedding feast of the Bride and Bridegroom in the eternal Kingdom. In both of those cases we are presented with many who will be cast aside into the outer darkness where there is the weeping and gnashing of teeth; many will be left out of Heaven, because they are either led astray by the devil and the world—by false teachers—or because they tried to buy their salvation through their works.

Even in today’s Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew leaves the goats on the left outside the Kingdom of Heaven. They are sentenced to be cursed with the devil and his angels and are sent to be imprisoned in the fires of Hell which was prepared for the devil and his angels. We have these images presented to us in the last three Sundays of the Church’s year of many people being left out of Heaven; of many people being sentenced to God’s eternal wrath and displeasure in the eternal fires of Hell. It can lead us who hope for an eternal life, and who hope for the joys of Heaven to sit in fear and despair over the fate of those who are lost. The question we are often tempted by the devil to ask is: “Do I deserve the rewards of Heaven?” Many times we answer that question in the

negative. We are undeserving of God's grace and glory. We deserve the fate of His eternal wrath and displeasure, for we sin daily, and much. Therefore, our consciences accuse us—Satan accuses us—and we are led to believe that we have too much sin to be worthy of the rewards of Heaven.

The images that are shown to us in the parables of these last three Sundays of the Church's year do not help. There is much "doom and gloom" that we see in them. Our reaction to the sentence passed on the unfaithful, and those relying on their works is exemplified in the reaction of the sheep on the right hand of the Son of Man. He tells them all the good works that they did in their lives, and they are aghast with wonder and amazement, because in their minds these works were not done by them. They only saw their sinfulness and disobedience. They only see their unworthiness on account of their manifold sins and trespasses. They are in utter shock that they are labeled with the sheep and are rewarded with the Kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world.

And this is precisely the point! These eschatological texts—these last three Sundays of the Church's year which point to the Last Day—can lead one into thinking that those days will be filled with much sorrow and persecution. The days leading up to the Last Day may indeed be filled with such pain, misery, and loss. But the "doom and gloom" of the days leading up to the Last Day is not really the point that the Church is trying to make with these Gospel readings from the Gospel of St. Matthew (these texts from our Lord's final days before His crucifixion). The point the Church is trying to impress upon us with these pericopes is that the rewards of Heaven await us if we remain steadfast in our faithfulness.

Perhaps that is why these texts pointing to the Last Day hold such trepidation for us. For we know how unfaithful we can be. We doubt God's words and promises. We sin often; daily, indeed hourly. Just consider the list that our Lord attributes to the sheep on the right hand: when have we done any of these things? Do we feed the hungry, or give drink to the thirsty? Do we welcome in strangers? Visit those in prison? Clothe the naked, or visit the sick? We have to confess with the sheep on the right hand that we do not. When have we done these things? When have we done them with willing and open hearts? If we do perform these things we do them grudgingly and because we feel obligated to do them. No, my dear friends, if we are honest with ourselves, we must confess that if we are to rely on our good works for salvation, we deserve nothing but God's wrath and displeasure. For we have not done any good works perfectly.

Our Lord + Jesus, however, does not see it that way. For He sees our faith in Him—our trust in His works and merits—and credits His perfect righteousness to us. He sees our Holy Baptism, wherein we are clothed through faith with the white robes of His righteousness and credits that righteousness to us. He sees us come before Him to this altar and receive His true and substantial Body and Blood in bread in wine in faith for the remission of our sins, and credits us with reconciliation to the Lord God. We are justified—that is, made right with the Lord God—through faith in Him and His righteousness. We cling to His works and righteousness in faith, and it is credited to us.

Therefore, the Last Day is not a day of trepidation. It is not a day of wrath and mourning for us poor, miserable sinners who cling in faith to the cross of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. It is not a dreadful day filled with the weeping and gnashing of teeth in utter darkness. It is a day of thanks to our Lord God! For the point that the Church is trying to impress upon us in these last Sundays of the Church's year is not "doom and gloom" but it is pointing us to our eternal reward in Heaven. It is directing us to rejoice that the joys of Heaven await us who have remained faithful; who have clung in faith the merits of the Christ, and who have forsaken their own works, and humbled themselves daily by contrition and sorrow over their sins. We are presented in these last Sundays of the Church's year a picture of our eternal reward; the joys of the eternal Kingdom which has been prepared for us since before the foundation of the world.

The true warning that is presented us in these texts from the last Sundays of the Church's year is to not become puffed up in our pride. This is a very real temptation that many people who call themselves Christians have fallen into. It is something that we ourselves can easily fall into. For we like to praise our good works. We like to compare ourselves to other people, and say to ourselves, "well at least I am not as miserable as that person." This is exactly what the goats on the left have done! Their pride in how good of a Christian they are, has led them into thinking that their good works are to be praised. They are shocked! How can someone discredit them for all the "good things" they had done in this life. This is why pride is an especially devious and misleading sin. For it deceives us into thinking that we have something in us worthy of praise.

This is also why the Church presents us these Gospel readings in the last three Sundays of the Church's year. To awaken us out of our sleep, to warn us to flee from false and misleading teachers, and to turn us away from trust in our works and merits. For these things only lead to the eternal fires of Hell; to the outer darkness, where there will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Church warns us so that we might turn away from ourselves and cling in faith to the Christ, for if we do not then we do merit nothing but the eternal fire—the eternal punishment—prepared for the devil and his angels.

Therefore, my dear friends, turn away from trusting in your works, and cling in faith to the Christ. For He has already perfectly fulfilled the Law. His way is perfect. His works are perfect. And He credits the righteousness that is rightfully His to us on account of our faith in Him. He has already paid the penalty for our sins. He has come down from Heaven, and taken upon Himself our flesh, so that He might suffer and die for us and to pay the penalty of our sins upon the holy cross. He was crucified for us so that we might be called His sheep.

He has become our Shepherd. He has made us His sheep through the work of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. He leads us to our eternal home—to the eternal pastures of His heavenly Kingdom. There we will rejoice and give thanks to the Lord God eternally, for He has redeemed and saved us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He has delivered us from the eternal fires of Hell, and has opened to the gates of His eternal Kingdom in which we will no longer know any sorrow or pain. This is the promise made to us. This is what we have to look forward to on the Last Day. It will not be a day of wrath and mourning—of dread and tears—but will be a Day when we will at last enjoy the eternal majesty and glory of our Lord and Savior, + Jesus, the Christ. In that Kingdom we will join with the multitudes of Heaven and sing His praise for all eternity. That Day will last forever, and we will forever enjoy its joys. May that Day come quickly and take us from this vale of sorrow to our eternal joy in Heaven. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, 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!