

Last Sunday of the Church Year November 26, 2023  
Text: Matt 25:31-46  
Theme: It's not that hard really

**Our Gospel for today can seem terrifying to those who are marginal believers. If they are a once or twice a year attendee and they happen to pop in for worship on this day, they might not be back. Jesus, the King of Glory, is sitting upon His throne and judging the world. Well, no one likes being judged. He's talking about visiting prisoners and helping the poor and I just don't know that I have done enough of that. So, it makes me uncomfortable. Is Jesus saying that I will receive eternal punishment if I haven't visited enough people in prison, or given enough money to feed the hungry, or visited enough sick people?**

**Those who hang out here on a regular basis understand that our salvation is based neither on the things that we do, nor the things that we fail to do. That is called works righteousness and it is the go-to position for human beings. We have been taught since childhood that anything worthwhile requires work and eternal life is certainly worthwhile, so, we conjecture, Jesus must be giving us the syllabus for Christian life here in this Gospel. Do 90% of what He requires and you get an A. Do less than 60% and it's off to eternal punishment for you. That's the way it works in school with grades and scholarships. That's the way it works in the world when you**

**get merit raises. You have your annual review and if you have ticked the right boxes, you get a raise. If you haven't, you get frozen, reprimanded, reduced, or even fired. But that is not the way it works in the Church. Salvation is pure gift and nothing else. The prophet Ezekiel tells us this in our Old Testament reading for today,**

**"For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness....I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak...."**

**That is what God did for us. Wherever you were, He sought you out and created faith in you, and that faith is never stagnant. It is always doing something. What Jesus described in our Gospel for today is not what we *should* do but what we *are doing* as faith grows in us and overflows from us onto everyone around us. Every time you show love and care for another human being, you are doing it for Jesus and you are not doing it because you are such a swell person but because the faith that he created in you is working,**

**growing, and bubbling over. That is just what faith does. Jesus is not giving us a syllabus to accomplish but an explanation of how faith works. Those who have faith will be moved to treat others with love and compassion. Those without faith or with weak faith may do nice things but they have a different motivation. We seek to please God. They may be trying to get a good feeling from helping someone, or look good to their community, or fulfill a perceived societal obligation. There are many societal benefits for being a nice person but only faith pleases God.**

**So, that's why it is not that hard to do good works for each other. Those with faith kind of laugh when our good works are noted, because we are only doing what we have been empowered to do. It is not that hard. We actually even enjoy helping others who are struggling with life. That is what we do. Well, more precisely, it is what our faith does and what it will continue to do until that great day when Jesus returns for us and takes us into paradise where for the first time we will be in a place where being faithful is the norm not the exception.**

**Don't be surprised that people of weak faith don't understand why you do what you do. Why would they? If God's Word and Sacrament are not burning within them, they are not motivated to do good the way you are. They might be motivated by money, or**

**fame or guilt or any number of things but not faith. So, when they see you doing good works, they are going to try to figure out what your angle is. What are you getting out of it? The answer is nothing... and everything.**

**You get nothing out of most of the good works you do. You write checks for the church. You buy food for the hungry. You give up your time to help feed the youth, to volunteer at the Adult Day Care, to give rides to and from church, to clean and fix this building, and you get nothing in return. But at the same time, you get everything. You don't care about hoarding your earthly resources because you know that God has plenty more where that came from. You don't mind giving your time because you have an eternity in paradise awaiting you. You like helping people because when you do, you feel closer to God as God invites you to be His hands and feet in this broken world.**

**It's really not that hard to be who God has made us to be. Read His Word. Remember your baptism and receive the Body and Blood of Christ every week and the rest comes naturally...or really, it comes supernaturally.**