

Sermon for November 26, 2017
Christ the King Sunday
“The End”

Matthew 25:31-46

The world is coming to an end! "Well the preacher's done gone off the deep end." We think that only kooks and crack pots talk about the end of the world. This attitude toward the subject of the end of the world is fostered by those people who are constantly setting dates for the world's demise. Like the book "89 Reasons Why the World Will End in 1989," those dates come and go without event, and we begin to question the credibility of those people. When we think about people saying the end is coming, we think of the stereotypical lunatic standing on the street corner with a sign that says, "The world will end tomorrow!" Or maybe we think of those cults which spring up every now and then who say the world will end on a certain date but then the date just comes and goes.

Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the end of the age. Sometimes I think we don't realize that. He was constantly saying that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. He said when the Son of Man returns it will be as if this. Or the Kingdom of Heaven is like that. The coming judgment and glory of God was a constant theme in Jesus' teaching.

But Jesus seems like a level headed sort of guy. It may seem hard for some to think that he went in big for this end of the world stuff. So often times we overlook or explain away Jesus' teachings and sayings about the end of the world.

The disciples who followed Jesus could not escape the truth that their master was constantly talking about the coming of the Son of Man, or the end of the age, or the coming Kingdom of Heaven. They had heard Jesus talk about the coming of the Kingdom. And they truly believed that it was at hand. Once they even argued amongst themselves who among them would be the greatest. So they asked Jesus, "What will be the signs of the end of the age?" It took two chapters of Matthew's Gospel record Jesus' reply.

All this talk about being ready for the day of the Lord probably worried them as it does many of us. I imagine they looked at one another and said, "Jesus said that we should keep our lamps filled with oil ready to be trimmed, but what do we do to be ready? Should we spend all our time trying to read signs so that we know when it is? Maybe if we study the Scriptures we can predict the time. Maybe we should read through all the news papers for events that might be signs of his return. Should we spend all our spare time looking to the sky for his return?"

Jesus knew his disciples' thoughts. So he tried to calm their fears and answer those questions. He did it by giving them a parable.

That parable went something like this: When Judgment Day comes and the Son of Man comes in glory, he will sit on a throne with all his angels around him, and he will gather all the nations of the world in front of him so that he can sort them out. It will be like a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

Then he will turn to the ones on his right hand and say, "Come over here all of you. You are the ones that my Father will bless. You see, when I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will look at each other in bewilderment and they will say: "Jesus, not that we are complaining or anything, but there is something we don't understand. I know I saw pictures of you

in my Sunday School books, but I never saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you water, and when were you ever a stranger and I welcomed you or naked and I clothed you? When did I ever see you sick or in prison and cared for you.” Then the king will say to them: “Remember when you helped serve food at that soup kitchen. I was there. I was dying of hunger and I came through that soup line many times and you served me a hot bowl of soup each time. You over there, remember when that missionary came to your church and said that the town he worked in needed fresh water. I lived in that town. Because you gave to that missionary I had water to drink. And you, yea you over there, remember that refugee family your church helped? You helped them get established her in your community. That was me, and you welcomed me to your town. And you, with the blue pants, remember when you were a volunteer at the hospital. Do you remember that AIDS patient that you talked to? Most of the doctors and nurses didn't want anything to do with me. You were the only one who wasn't scared to care about me. You see if you helped any of my brothers and sisters you were helping me.”

Then the king will turn to those on his left and say, “Get out of here, you who are cursed, and burn in the fires prepared to burn the Devil, cause when I came to you hungry you said, ‘Get a job.’ When I was thirsty, you polluted my water. When I was a stranger, you excluded me because you thought I might be a threat. When I was homeless you just passed by and tried to ignore me. When I was sick you refused to visit me because you thought you might catch my cancer, and when I was in prison you said I was a menace to society and should stay locked up.”

Then they will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or homeless or sick or in prison? If we had known it was you we would have taken you out to a restaurant.” One will say, "If I had known that was you on that street corner, I would have asked you to stay at my house." Another will say, “If I had known you were a refugee, I would have helped you.” Still another will say, "If I had known that was your water, I would have been more careful." Yet another will say, "If I had known you were in the hospital or in prison, I would have visited you every day and I would have brought you flowers too."

Then the King will say to them, “Look, I'm telling you the truth, if you turned your back on anyone, no matter what kind of person it was, then you turned your back on me.”

Those who were ignoring God's love will be surprised when Jesus returns because they were not about their Father's business. They will be punished forever. But those who remembered God's love and showed it to others, will be ready. They will enter into eternal life.

I'm sure this parable was a hard one for the disciples. And it is a hard one for us too. It is hard because each of us can see ourselves on both sides. We can all remember times when we helped someone in need. But we can also remember times when we didn't. So we are stuck asking ourselves if we are sheep or goats.

In the end we just need to let this parable be a challenge to us. A challenge to live out God's love with a new depth. A challenge to seek God's guidance to show us how to love others. And a challenge to ask for forgiveness when we fail to.

Like many of Jesus' parable it leads us back to the same point. We can only find that depth with God's help. Only Christ's love can give us the strength to love the unlovable. Only God's Holy Spirit can give us the guidance to know how to help those who others have been deemed lost cases. Trust Jesus to meet the challenge and then you will be ready. And when Jesus returns he will say to you, “You helped the least of my sisters and brothers and you helped me. Enter into the Kingdom.”