**Befriending Christ in His Humiliation**

Based on [Matthew 25:31-46](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt25.31-46)

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Last Sunday of the Church Year, Proper 29

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The Gospel lesson is about the necessity of receiving Jesus in his humiliation, and this is done by receiving his disciples in their humiliation.

For this the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we continue in Jesus’ Last days discourse in Matthew. The last few Sundays have been Jesus telling parables about what the kingdom of heaven is “like” with respect to Judgment Day. “**The kingdom of heaven is like…Ten Virgins with lamps**” “**The kingdom of heaven is like…A man entrusting talents to his servants.**” Today, no more parables. Today Jesus does not tell us what Judgment day will be “like.” Instead he tells us what will *actually happen* on Judgment day.

Jesus will come from heaven as a King with all angels attending him. And he will appear before every nation and all people. And he will come to judge and separate the righteous people from the unrighteous people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And once the scene is set, the lesson moves to a dialogue. **The Son of Man speaks**! And he gives an account of his own judgment.

Wise virgins were distinguished from foolish because they had an extra flask of oil. Faithful servants were distinguished from the wicked servant because they traded with their talents rather than make excuses. **So what is the difference here that distinguish the sheep from the goats?** The difference between the sheep and the goats is that **the sheep had *received Jesus on earth*; and the goats had denied him. And both sheep and goats did so without realizing it was him.**

On Judgment day, you will be judged *by your deeds*. What are these deeds? Well they are not helping the poor, or lending a helping hand, or being there for somebody in need. These are not the works or deeds that you will be judged by. Even the pagans are philanthropists, and they are no less children of hell for it. In this parable Jesus is clear: the works you will be judged by is whether or not you welcomed, clothed, visited, or came *to Him*…to Jesus, in his humiliation." Someone might say, “*But Jesus is in heaven, how can I come to him, welcome him?”* Y**ou welcome Jesus by welcoming his *brothers in their humiliation*.**

Matt. 12:49 says, “And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.” Jesus brothers are his disciples. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is received when his disciples are received because of the Gospel. Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the twelve disciples with his message and works. **He tells them to bring no food because the laborer deserves his wages.** They were to go from house to house and get their food and drink water and clothing as it were, from the house that welcomes them. And Jesus says, "**If anyone will not receive or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town…for whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects Him who sent me.**"

Jesus continues, "The one who receives a prophet *because he is a prophet* will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person *because he is a righteous person* will receive a righteous person's reward**. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water *because he is a disciple*, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward**." This is recorded in Matthew, the same gospel as we are considering today. When a disciple, one who has been taught all Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:19), is given a cup of cold water *because he is a disciple*, the person *who gives it* is a sheep, who knows and recognizes the Good Shepherds voice, even if he is speaking through a messenger.

If those who speak his word are rejected or treated shamefully or dismissively, it's no defense on the last day to say, "**Well, Jesus, your disciple didn't look like you. I didn't recognize it was you."** Of course that's the point. God comes to his people incognito. God comes in disguise so that he is recognized by faith, not appearances. St. Paul says, **“[T]hough he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross**” (Phil. 2:6-8).

There could not be a better disguise for God. Coming not in the form of a man, but the form of a servant, humbling himself. God comes in humility…that’s Jesus…and now that he is exalted… he remains visibly on earth in the humility of his church, his body. And note this well…his church not recognized by her steeple and cross, or the size and success of her outward membership. The church, like her bridegroom, is recognized by her humility, her humbling herself, her being obedient to God to the point of death. The size of the church doesn’t matter; social standing in the community doesn’t matter;…what matters is that they are obedient to the sound words of Christ, even if it affects the offering plate, even if others call them unloving and intolerant.

Here we are, the church, the only place in Lethbridge Alberta that preaches and practices according to Sound Doctrine. We are here so that Christ’s Sheep can find him in this town and come to him and welcome him. And that is how every true Church of Christ will view itself. And as the days grow evil--the church is going to become hungry, thirsty, a more of a stranger, naked, sick and even imprisoned.

In Illustration: my first year as a pastor, at the end of that year the church was tens of thousands of dollars short of budget. I was worried, but within the last couple of weeks, huge donations were made. At first, in my naiveté I said: “Wow, when it came down to it people really stepped up their giving. Someone corrected me. They said, “No…it’s the end of the tax year. People give more at the end of the year, calculating the amount based on how much charitable tax room they have left.

There’s nothing wrong with using tax benefits to increase your charitable giving to the church. But what happens when the culture finally says, “**If you preach that there are only two genders, that abortion is murder, and that those who don’t believe in your religion are going to hell, you are no longer a charitable organization but a political action group.**” When that happens, those who invested in building bigger barns to house more goats and fair-weather Christians—they become slaves to their investment in the world. And will say “**Well, we better not preach that, or else we’ll have to close our doors for lack of funds**.” Or they will suffer a great collapse, maybe even have to shut their doors, because they were not prepared for it. The unfaithful churches will continue to thrive perhaps even grow and swell with goats, while those who remain faithful will suffer for it, because the world cannot tolerate sound doctrine.

Goat’s cannot tolerate sound doctrine, Because they refuse to repent, God’s word is painful for them to hear. That’s why hell for them is described as an eternal “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” God will come in full glory and the heavens and the earth and there will be no escape from His Word, no toleration of those who reject his commands. **Hell will be an eternal calling to repentance of those who will not repent, but will eternally, writhe like a worm on a hook, a worm that will not die, melt like a snowflake because they cannot stand in God’s word**. And on that day God will no longer veil his Word in humility, but will come in full glory so that every corner of creation--**from the throne room of heaven to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**--will be in the full presence and power of the Almighty God, and his appointed judge on the throne whose only final act is not to bring some into his presence an others away—but only to separate them from one another.

Until that day, you can see why the goats will not give the true church of Jesus Christ even a cup of cold water. The world will imprison the church for preaching the Gospel and the goats will not visit them. The church will be stripped of all it has, and the goats will not give her even so much as blanket. Because the true church will continue to preach, and goats cannot bear to stand in the presence of Gods word, they hate it and they hate those who preach and believe it. **They don’t realize that by staying away from Christ’s church, and true brothers and sisters of the Word in the faith, they are avoiding Christ himself.** And on the last day, what they have done will be clearly seen and judged.

Until that day, God comes to you in disguise. He keeps his glory from your eyes so that you can recognize and receive him with your ears. For St. Paul says, “**Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God** (Romans 10). For Jesus said to “Doubting” Thomas, “**You believe because you see me; blessed are those who have *not seen* and have yet believed**” (John 20:29). Hebrews 13:2 says, “**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares**.” Do you know who angels are? Angels are messengers from God. Evidently they can come in disguise. And if you deny hospitality to the messenger, you deny hospitality to God.

And so Jesus tells his disciples in John 20:21, “**As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you**.” “As the Father has sent me”…That is, in weakness, with only the power of the Word. And in Matthew 10:16, “**I am sending you as sheep amidst wolves**.” Jesus promises that, if you are a disciple you will face rapacious rejection for it. That is, unless you bury his teaching, remove his word from your lips to hide from the wolves. In that case, repent, for Jesus didn’t teach his word so you can sit on it. He gave it to you so that others can be saved ***by welcoming it by welcoming you***, feeding you, and visiting you ***because of*** His Word that you give them.

For the goats, the *theirs* is the day of wrath and judgment. There is no Gospel here for them, in this sermon or in Jesus words. For they wear their sins rather than their baptism. **There is no grace, for they rejected God’s word and message of Grace and cast away those disciples who would speak it to them in love.**  Their hearts were revealed even then, but in the end their shame is revealed before all people. For Jesus says, “**In rejecting them you rejected me…depart into the eternal punishment on that day**.”

Martin Luther once said, “You think you would have helped Jesus when he was on earth…well here he is, in your neighbor.” I would modify that to say, here he is in his disciples, his church. Not the box store churches that bury Christ’s commands in order to streamline and sell socially acceptable gospel. Not to Lukewarm churches that speak much but say nothing. Not mega churches that have long since given up preaching to sheep in order to entertain goats. It is shameful to let the size, or the wealth, or the prestige of your church determine Christ’s presence. Instead, here is Christ… where two or three are gathered in His Name, not ashamed of His Words or shifting his doctrine with the culture…but obeying it to the point of death, even death on the cross.

Christ’s church is the sheep, the little children who come in weakness and speak God’s word indiscriminately with the mouth of babes, and who receive that word as children with welcome and cheer, the last day is a day of ***vindication***. ***All there is* is gospel and grace and good news for you**. All will be revealed, and you will be show to be righteous. Your simple faith in the words and commands of Jesus, received and welcomed with joy and hospitality to the happy-footed messenger (Romans 10:15) will be rewarded as was promised. You were prepared for this day and now it has come and you will enter as righteous into eternal life. And the King will say, “**Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**.”