

## **SERMON**

**Last Sunday after Pentecost Year A**

**Christ the King Sunday**

### **Matthew 25:31-46**

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

Help me not to waste my energy feeling sorry for myself.  
Help me, instead, to be more patient, more faithful, more  
loving and more courageous.

Help me... help us ... to be all that we can be. **Amen.**

**Sermon:**

Today we heard<sup>i</sup> from Matthew's Gospel.

Back in his day, in Matthew's neighborhood,  
He was just another crooked tax collector<sup>ii</sup>  
Working for the Man.

But, suddenly, Jesus touched his heart.

Today we read from Matthew's Chapter 25<sup>iii</sup>, but  
to get the whole picture we have to look at Chapter 22.

That's where Jesus condemned Israel's refusal  
to hear and to act on Yahweh's messages.

That's where Jesus, Yahweh's Son and Messenger, warned  
that Israel could lose its favored status with Yahweh.<sup>iv</sup>

*"For many are invited", Jesus said, "but few are chosen."*<sup>v</sup>

Do you remember that Jesus asked his followers,  
*"... which commandment ... is the greatest"?*<sup>vi</sup>

He told them that the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment is:

*"Love the Lord ... God with all your heart*

*and with all your soul and with all your mind”.<sup>vii</sup>*

And he said that the 2<sup>nd</sup> is like unto it:

*“... love<sup>viii</sup> your neighbor as yourself”.*

So, what does it look like when we love  
the Lord and our neighbor? <sup>ix</sup>

It looks like this:

- Welcoming strangers.
- Feeding the hungry.
- Giving water to the thirsty.
- Giving clothing to the naked.
- Taking care of those who are helpless or sick.

If we do such things, if we live like that,  
our King will say to us, one day:

*“... just as you did it to ... the least of these...  
you did it to me.”<sup>x</sup>*

*We may not always succeed, but we have to at least TRY.*

Today’s Gospel is complex.

Some preachers say it’s about  
the End Times and Final Judgment.

They say so often and with such fervor,  
It’s like they’re selling stock in **EndTimes.com!**

I don’t know. Maybe, they’re right.

They want us to think that the End Times is about us.  
But is it?

Are we supposed to live our Christian lives  
Worrying about what will happen to us?

Do we always have to read the Scriptures  
as if they are about us and  
what we think are our needs?

That stuff does matter.

But I don't think that was Jesus' main focus.  
He wasn't as hung up on our punishment and  
Our reward as we are.

He did warn the Temple Leaders about what might come,  
But He talked a lot about living, and loving one another,  
here and now.

Matthew's focus is on how to live an authentic Christian life.  
He wanted us to know --- Jesus wanted us to know ---  
what that kind of life looks like.<sup>xi</sup>

Matthew's focus – Jesus' focus – was on love.  
Mathew's focus was *Love*. Jesus' focus was love.  
And it must be our focus, too.

You know, The Beatles were right, all along.  
*All you need is love.*<sup>xii</sup>

Jesus tells us how to love *and* he shows us how to love.  
All the way to the Cross he was showing us

what love looks like.

To do his work Jesus left a safe place in Galilee  
and travelled to his enemy's home turf, in Jerusalem.

Jesus was an Old Testament kind of guy.  
He was the Son of God.  
But like any rabbi, he relied on the Torah.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes,  
Also knew the scriptures well,  
but they read what they wanted to read.

Jesus stepped out of the safe zone.  
He denounced the Pharisees.  
He pushed the Sadducees.  
He corrected the scribes.

Jesus took a chance. And He calls us to do that, too.<sup>xiii</sup>  
Even today.

Even in the midst of our Virus daze,  
as our world is marred by too much screen time,  
and a sensual and sensory overload.

Wherever we turn now we are bombarded by  
Angry, partisan, anti-social meta-narratives,

We're on-line more than ever.  
The Net offers an endless smorgasbord of  
me-centered "lifestyles" and "world views".

And yet, in the midst of all that Jesus calls us  
*to serve and to love.*

Today's Gospel is about the two great commandments.

God has given us a non-negotiable.

We are called by Jesus to an alternative life-style  
That builds up, and doesn't tear down.<sup>xiv</sup>

For most of us our work is not so much  
fighting those who cause injustice --  
although that righteous battle must be fought.

Instead, our Godly work focus is helping those  
who suffer from injustice.

Jesus didn't expect perfection and neither does God.  
We will misunderstand God's plan.  
We will make mistakes.

*Perfection is not within our grasp.  
But, Loving those around us, is.*

We all blow it. I blow it all the time. Sometimes I forget that.  
*But, God gave me my wonderful family to remind me!*

My girls give me slack because I need it.  
God gives us slack, too. Because we need it.

But, God notices when we try our best.  
We do get Brownie points for effort!

Serve God by serving others.

Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Treat them like you would want to be treated.  
No matter whose sign was in their front yard.

Let's at least try to live like that,  
because that's what God wants,  
that's how Jesus lived and died, and  
that's how God justice is done.

**AMEN**

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<sup>i</sup> Today's Gospel reading arguably includes not only one complete story (called a "pericope"), but also part of another. I think that, at Matthew 22:34, the word "When" signals a change of circumstances and begins a new "paragraph" and story, if they used paragraphs in those days (which they didn't). The paragraph regarded the Pharisee's discussion, after Jesus' teaching had silenced the Sadducees, and astonished the crowds.

NB: The NIV begins Matthew 22:34 with the word "hearing", whereas the NASV, the RSV, and the ASV begin with the word "but". The Greek phrase variously translated as "when", and "but" is *oi de*; the word "now" is *nun*. Each of these translations signal the beginning of a new thought or line of discussion.

<sup>ii</sup> As mentioned in prior sermons, and as per Matt. 9:9, Mark 2:14, and Luke 5:27–28, Matthew was a tax collector, aka a "publican". A Jewish man who collected Roman taxes from his own people, and skimmed of the top, Mathew was considered a traitor. Notably, neither Mark nor Luke identify Matthew as a tax collector (but see, the inference in Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:15). However, in his own Gospel, Matthew describes himself as a "tax collector". (See, Matt. 10:2–4)

Because Tax Collectors were responsible to collect a certain sum of money and their Roman patrons weren't too particular as to how that was done, Mathew was subject to very little oversight. He probably was the crook that his Jewish neighbors thought him to be. Notably, John the Baptist chastised people like Matthew saying, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do". (See, Luke 3:12–13).

In his Gospel Matthew wrote about the time that Jesus came to dinner at his house. When the Pharisees asked Jesus why he ate with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice', for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (See, Matt. 9:11-12)

Did Matthew write the Gospel that bears his name? Some scholars doubt that claim since so much of his Gospel (like Luke's) relies heavily on Mark's Gospel. By the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century the Christian church had attributed the subject Gospel to Matthew, even though it was anonymous. Notably, the Gospel attributed to Matthew, the tax collector, mentions money a lot; Matthew was a money oriented guy, so there is some slim internal evidence of the book's authorship. By comparison, some suggest that Luke, a physician, mentioned medical issues more commonly in his book. See, <https://overviewbible.com/matthew-the-apostle/>



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iii Several points: 1<sup>st</sup>, neither Matthew nor the other Gospel writers used such modern style; no paragraph breaks, no punctuation, nor capital or small case letters. The many available book fragments are, mostly, in effect, one run-on sentence. 2<sup>nd</sup>, The Gospel of Matthew is the first of the five historical books of the New Testament. Those five books, the Gospels and Acts, are “the foundation on which the epistles are built”, and they provide virtually all of the information available to us for the theologically key events in the life of Jesus. Indeed, but for the Gospels and Josephus' Antiquities the Christ story is almost entirely missing in the historical record.

iv Once saved, always saved?

v Matthew 22:14, Promise Keepers Study Bible, The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, MI.

vi Recall that Jesus' cursed a fig tree; that action seems weird to me. Did the fig tree symbolize Israel? I think so. Was Jesus reminding his followers that Isaiah had already condemned Israel's failure? Isaiah 5 compares Israel to a vineyard, and Jesus was using the same analogy in his parable. Recall also that Jesus told his disciples the vineyard would be opened to the Gentiles, to produce fruit, if Israel would not. See also, Matthew 21:19-21, 33:45, Ibid.

vii i.e., the “greatest”.

viii For the purposes of this sermon, my intention will focus upon the question of how we shall love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our mind, as set forth in both Matthew 22:37 and Deuteronomy 6:5.

The English word “greatest” comes from the Koine Greek word is *megas*, variously defined as referring to something which is the most intense, or being the largest, or having the greatest stature and age. The term is also used to speak to the ranking of one thing to another thing, and in so being used, that the thing or person which is “*megas*”, is esteemed more highly than the others, and attributed to it is more eminence or excellence.

The word *agapeseis* is a variation of the word *agape*, which is to be full of good will and to exhibit love. The phrase speaks to the prizing of a beloved thing above all other things, in such a way that the lover is unwilling to abandon that love, or to surrender it in favor of another person or thing. Agape is said to involve “the idea of affectionate reverence” and to mirror “the benevolence which God, in providing salvation for men”

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exhibited by sending his only Son to human beings, and then giving him up to death at their hand.

This form of love is distinct from *phileo*, a Greek word sometimes describing as meaning “brotherly or sisterly love”. The Koine Greek translated for the phrase “you shall love” is *agapeseis*; that word might also be translated as “you shall love” or “you love”.

The Koine Greek word used for neighbor is *plesion*. *Plesion*, a neuter derivative of *pelas*, is defined “neighbor”. It may include friends, or any other person similarly situated, such as one Jew and another Jew, or, as used by Christ in this phrase, it may mean any other person, irrespective of nature or religion.

See, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Hendrickson Publishers, Joseph H. Thayer, Peabody, MA 2005.

<sup>ix</sup> The great Shema, mentions the first commandment.

<sup>x</sup> And to those who did not, He will say, “... depart from me into the eternal fire .... for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” For “just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

<sup>xi</sup> See, for example, Matthew 3:15

<sup>xii</sup> "All You Need Is Love", a single written by John Lennon, attributed to the (John) Lennon-(Paul) McCartney and sung by The Beatles. Released July 7, 1967 and later included on the US Magical Mystery Tour album.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_You\\_Need\\_Is\\_Love](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_You_Need_Is_Love)

<sup>xiii</sup> Introducing the New Testament, at p. 115

<sup>xiii</sup> We must be as forgiving of their errors and sins as we are of our own.

<sup>xiii</sup> Which offers loving and patient correction where needed, and is focused on the consequences of not loving, both as individuals and as a people.

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