

**“If You Get It, You Already Have It; and IT MATTERS!”**

**Christ the King A.... Nov. 22, 2020 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed**

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

[Jesus said:] 31“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. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the dominion prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for 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, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then 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? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And 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.’ 41Then 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 the devil’s angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I 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.’ 44Then 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?’ 45Then 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.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

*On this final Sunday of the liturgical year, we receive a parable (3<sup>rd</sup> of the final 3) from Jesus challenging and inspiring our imaginations to grasp our whole vocation that is celebrated in baptism: to embody Christ in every moment and to engage every part of our world as Christ’s redeemed creation (Creation itself as well as people).*

*The parable of the sheep and the goats has frequently been used to instill fear of God’s judgment. Extraordinarily influential throughout the history of Christianity, this parable has often functioned as “law,” the command to care for the neighbor that is bolstered with the threat of hell. As “gospel” we see the parable as affirming the*

*continuing presence of Christ in our midst. The risen Lord is not far away in some heaven, but is present around us every day.*

*A Grace oriented perspective of the parable is that Jesus' point here is to urge his disciples to share God's generous saving grace with all. Jesus' parables consistently offer a simple setting and story, but behind them lie a world of rich meaning that takes a lifetime to unpack. For this reason, Jesus' parables are important texts for the postmodern church, which is hungry for story, for connection, and for meaning for our faithful lifelong questions.*

*Two quotes invite God's people to follow the invitation of Jesus:*

*"Be the change you wish to see in the world." —Mahatma Gandhi*

*"You pray for the hungry. Then you feed them. This is how prayer works." Pp. Francis*

*It is interesting that both the righteous and the unrighteous have the same question in Matthew's gospel. Both ask Jesus, "When was it we saw you hungry or thirsty?" Neither group can recognize Jesus even when he is right in front of them. Apparently, no one is very good at recognizing Jesus. Martin Luther instructed his followers to be "little Christs" to one another. God's people are invited **to be Christ AND to feed Christ**—all at the same time. (Thanks to SundaysandSeasons.com)*

*ELCA:Hell: <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/03/pondering-eternity-heaven-hell/>*

*A) More than the other gospels Matthew has a theme of Judgment throughout its story; perhaps because it is primarily written for a Jewish orientated audience who has a high value on theme of obedience vs disobedience. Do you resonate with a God portrayed as more Judgmental and Disciplining or a God who is more Forgiving and Gracious? How do you maintain your foundational faith worldview...do you experience the World/Life mainly through judgmental eyes or a gracious heart? How would others answer this about you?*

*B) Sociologists tell us that we tend to resonate/relate with leaders who reflect our understanding/perspective of God. If God is primarily Merciful then we will exercise our roles a bit more mercifully AND if God is more a Judge then we "let the chips fall where they may & let people feel the consequences of their actions," more easily. Has that influenced your view of authority figures in your life.... parents, teachers, pastors, judges, city leaders, presidents? How has this*

*shaped how you live out YOUR leading roles as parent, employer, community neighbor, PTA member, etc?*

- C) In this story people are just going about their routine of life.....It is Christ whom they encounter in the lives of other's in need and it is Christ whom they re-present as the provider of those blessings that we have received. We may only become more aware of that after the fact and perhaps only rarely in the moment. Can you recall moments like that? Have you recognized the Holiness of that experience/action/mercy moment? Have you come to experience those like an "Embrace of Grace" that you want over and over again because it warms your heart and soul? How does it impact you to know that within your actions/compassion and care for others you carry the presence of the living Christ and that you are caring for Christ in the world through every can of food, bottle of water or pair of socks offered to someone homeless or even a kind word or acknowledgment of their existence as a human being?*
- D) The understandings of Hell have evolved for many centuries; even before Christ. Ancient understandings of shadowy/silent place of souls (Hades, Sheol) became over centuries a fiery inferno of cleansing (purgatory) and punishment (lake of fire, damnation, etc). St. Augustine in Chptr 21 of his City of God (ca. 410+CE) was the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian theologian to develop this concept of torturous eternity. His views still influence today's thought. Most mainline denomination's today take an approach of emphasizing God's graciousness and the reality of Christ descending into hell to destroy its power/reality. (cf. the Apostles, Nicene Creeds) Therefore the emphasis of preaching/teaching is not to use Hell as an intimidating concept but rather to use God's Graciousness and desire that all should be saved and enjoy the relationship with their Creator as an attractor. In fact, for many there is a recognition that this ancient concept sets up a dualism (2 Gods, Satan & God; fighting in spiritual warfare) when in fact there is none – there is only a God who desires to save and build a relationship with all of the Creation that God loves and also a freedom to NOT engage with that during one's lifetime.....thereby missing out on the opportunity to experience the treasured promises of God and eternal life even as it carries its existence onward even now.....the Kingdom of God IS or HAS COME (and still remains) near. What do you think? How does this affect your view of evil, devil, God, Judgment, etc.?*
- E) Without a fear of Hell & with a confidence of a Loving God, does that change you?*