

The Second Last Sunday of the Church Year  
Matthew 25:31-46

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You have a problem. It's not COVID-19, although that virus can certainly be deadly. Your problem is not who's elected into the White House, although that certainly is important for our country. Your problem is not the rioters, although they certainly do a lot of damage and endanger many lives.

These three things have created a lot of misplaced fear in our country. It's not that these things shouldn't be respected. We should take precautions against spreading COVID-19. We should respect the civil government God has put in place in our country. And we should take precautions with those who wish us harm. A killer virus, corrupt government, and violent people are just a symptom of the real problem, sin.

You have a sin problem. The wages of sin are death. (Romans 6:23) Death comes to us all! Whether it's a virus, disease, or violence, death will come to you which shows that you have a death problem as well. But Jesus says that problem is already taken care of. Listen to the Word of God from Hebrews:

"Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for Him." (Hebrews 9:27-28)

Death had no claim on Jesus. He had no sin. But He willingly gave up His life for your sin. His death on the cross paid for your sin and my sin. Payment in full. It is done, just as He said on the cross. (John 19:30) Christ has already dealt with sin. He washes away your sin in your baptism and washes away your sin and death problem.

Jesus is your savior and the One you should fear. Pharmacy companies, the government, and the police are not your savior. They may certainly be helpful as we face serious problems, but they cannot take care of our sin problem. Only Jesus has done that.

When He comes again, it's not to take care of sin, but to execute justice. God's perfect justice. He sits upon His throne and judges all people. Before He pronounces justice, He separates the sheep from the goats. His criteria for separation isn't good deeds. His criteria for separation comes from Mark 16:16:

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

You've heard me talk about the marks of the church many times which are the Word taught purely and the Sacraments administered by Christ's command. The Christian also has marks. These marks are Baptism and belief. Sadly, many fall away from their baptism and reject believing the promises of Christ. They are baptized but they don't believe. The Christian believes the promises of Baptism and clings to them in the face of sin. They see the ugliness of their own sin, but they see even more the cleansing waters of Baptism.

It's true that there are those who aren't able to be baptized but believe in Jesus like the thief on the cross. It's not the lack of Baptism that condemns but the rejection of Baptism. Those who reject Baptism reject Jesus Himself.

Jesus separates the believers from unbelievers and places the believers on His right hand and the unbelievers on His left hand. And then He pronounces judgment.

To the sheep He says:

"Come, you who 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 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.' (vv. 34-36)

It sounds like Jesus is judging them based on their works but He is actually commending them on living out their faith. It would be hard for me to believe you're a Dodgers fan if you've never watched a game or followed their progress. It's also hard for me to believe that you're a Christian if there are never any good works. Faith produces works. Works, however, don't produce faith.

The devil wants you to be preoccupied with works. Either your own or the lack of works of your neighbor. He wants your eyes off of Christ and His promises. And he wants your eyes on your own belly. He wants you puffed up at your own goodness or righteously indignant at the lack of works of your neighbor.

If you're preoccupied with works, your faith will die. When you continue to look to Christ and His promises, good works naturally follow as you serve your neighbor in love guided by the ten commandments.

And the believer's have an interesting response to Jesus' praise. They are surprised. Basically they say, "Lord, when did we do these things?" (vv 37-39) Jesus says,

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (v. 40)

When Jesus says "my brothers" He could be talking about pastors and Christian teachers. They forgo a "regular" job to serve God's kingdom and rely on the generosity of those whom they serve. Or He could be talking about Christians who are young or having difficulties. These are Christians who are reliant on others for their well being. But He is most certainly talking about all Christians. You're His brothers and sisters. You're also His ambassadors. When you speak or act, you speak and act for Christ. When someone does good to you, they are doing good to Christ. This is why Paul says,

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."  
(Galatians 6:10)

Jesus then condemns the goats:

"Depart from me, you cursed, 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 no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” (vv. 41-43)

You might think they’re condemned for their lack of good works. In a way, this is correct. When there is no faith, there can be no works pleasing to God. Paul says that “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” (Romans 14:23) If we are to look to works alone all of us would be condemned which is why the devil wants you focused on your works.

The unbeliever lives out their faith as well. And their works show what they place their trust in and it is not the promises of God. They place their trust in men, money, or medicine and not in their creator. They hate their creator and this shows in the lack of works and spiteful behavior towards Christians who are Jesus’ brothers and sisters. They will face condemnation in hell which was made for Satan and his angels and not for men.

The goats are also surprised at the judgment of Christ. If they had only known what they were supposed to do, they would have surely done it. Their attitude shows they don’t believe God should be their judge. They don’t believe God is their Creator and they don’t believe Jesus was sent to save them. They despise God and want nothing to do with Him and they will get their wish. An eternity in hell separated from God forever.

However, God does not desire the eternal death of the wicked. He desires all to repent and believe in Him. (2 Peter 3:9) That’s why the church continues to proclaim Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of sins to the world. The church stands as a lighthouse pointing the way to the forgiveness of sins found nowhere else.

That's why you continue to proclaim Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of sins where God has placed you. You stand as a light on a lampstand pointing to the One in whom forgiveness is found. Some, like you, will repent and believe and be baptized. They will be converted from a goat into a sheep and be cared for by the Good Shepherd. Others will treat you like Chicken Little and continue to pursue the desires of their own flesh.

You are Jesus' little lamb. You shall not want. You are shepherded into green pastures and beside still waters. Your soul is refreshed. You are given righteousness that reflects God's perfect righteousness. You walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but you have nothing to fear be it virus or government or man. Goodness and mercy are yours in Christ. You shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

You will die. When you are in front of the judgment seat of God you will hear these sweet words:

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

Amen. Come Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20)

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen (Revelation 22:21)