

Our passage this morning is a difficult one for many reasons as it not only confronts us with the question of “what are you doing to share the message of Christ with the world” but it also brings up questions about serving Christ, Christ’s final judgment and the issue of heaven and hell. It makes us uncomfortable because it requires us to face questions we may have about faith, God’s grace, our response to God’s grace and how we feel about God’s choice to give his grace to whomever he chooses. This passage seems to imply that if you are just a good person and care for the world around you then you too shall inherit God’s kingdom which in some ways fits with the current world view which preaches a message of relativism, openness, tolerance and grace for all regardless of belief. And yet as Christians we have been taught that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ. So when we read this passage the question arises about salvation: is it based on works or on grace?

We have to be careful when we look at this passage and say it is all or nothing, one or the other. To say that salvation is simply given to those who do “good things” is dangerous because it leads us to a Christless universalism that is incongruent with the rest of the scriptures and is incongruent with Matthew’s own understanding of Christ and the work of Christ. The scriptures remind us always that we need to believe in Christ for our salvation. At the heart of this text is Christ, the one who is the judge, the one who ultimately decides who is given eternal life. This judge judges with grace and therefore we can’t predict or understand and what will happen. But as Christians this is our wake up call for those who do the works of Christ are ushered and may even be people who have never known him and those who have proclaimed Christ but have done nothing for him may become goats.

Dale Bruner writes “it is not said that Christ shall put the rich on his right hand and the poor on his left; or the learned and the noble on his right hand and the unlearned and despised on his left; but the godly on his right hand and the wicked on his left. All other divisions and subdivisions [among human beings] will then be abolished; but the great distinction will remain forever and all person’s eternal state will be determined by it” (Bruner commentary on Matthew, p 597). Those on his right will inherit the gift of eternal life and those on his left will be left with nothing.

In this one passage Christ is opening the gates of heaven to the simplest people in the world, he makes his kingdom accessible not to the great doers, the most popular people, the ones who give the most money or who appear to be the most spiritual but to those who simply do the will of the Father. The will of God is simply to feed, shelter and visit those in need, and it is through these little ministries of hospitality, healing, and reconciliation that the miracle of eternal salvation occurs. In our passage we are reminded that the elect- the chosen ones to inherit God’s kingdom are the ones who go out and serve Christ. Those who have been generous with Christ’s people, those who have served the least, the lowly just because, are the ones who have done the will of the Father. For Martin Luther this passage sees both good works to the poor and salvation by grace in Christ. Luther believed that we find Christ in the poor and the high command of love to serve those here on earth. But to serve the poor with humility and joy can only be done so

because of Christ, Christ who brought us love and grace on the cross. In many ways then this text is liberating as it means at the final judgment Christ will judge each of us through the lens of his grace and his standards and not by anything we can predict or determine ourselves. And yet at the same time it calls us into action. There is a subtle warning in our passage that we always need to be serving the least of these, lest we become a goat.

What does Christ want from us in this passage? What is our human responsibility with the time that we are given here on earth? The answer is love. Why do we go out and serve the poor and needy? Why do we do all the things a sheep does? We do it out of love for another. We do it because our lives have been changed by Christ and we desire to share that love with others. The sheep do not decide who is the hungry, the poor, the needy, the thirsty. They don't say that serving the least of these is someone else's problem, they simply go and serve. For many of us when we walk down the street and we see a homeless person we debate whether we should give them money, then we hear this passage in our head and we are stuck with a dilemma. We don't want to become a goat and yet we tell ourselves that more than likely this person will just go out and buy booze with the money, so why bother. I think though this passage asks us to go deeper than just handing a person a couple of bucks. The sheep are the ones who serve- not just one time, but make their life a life of service. You have heard the old saying "give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for life." The sheep are the ones who teach a man to fish, they don't have a check list of things they mark off to complete- they don't say "gave a poor person money today- check; gave my old clothes away, check; now I don't need to do anything. Rather they live a life of love always giving to the least of these. To be a disciple is more than giving lip service it means going out and living the Gospel daily and there are many ways we can do that for example.

This coming weekend the youth are doing a 30 hour famine with an organization called World vision which is a non profit organization that:

- a. partners with communities to improve lives, sets up programs including education, health, economic development, microfinance, agriculture, water and sanitation.
- b. They Also respond to disasters and assist in relief work for international emergencies
- c. they have advocacy programs that empower communities to know and to speak up for their rights at local, national and international levels. In situations where such community led advocacy is not possible WV takes the voices of those living in poverty to those decision-makers with the power to change unjust policies and practices
- d. They also focus on children, on education, hunger related programs, HIV/Aids programs, and sponsorship of children
- e. 30 Hour Famine is an international youth movement to fight hunger. this years theme: "a few empty stomachs can change the world!" the challenge is to go 30 hours w/o food (just water) during this time participants get a taste of hunger by not eating- something more than a billion people around

the world experience every day. This is a great way for students to fight hunger and serve God all at the same time

- f. Your challenge this coming weekend is to join the youth- if you can go 30 hours without food, see what it is like and give the money you would have spent on meals to a local food organization like Marin food bank, or donate to the church marked 30 hour famine. Or if you can't go without food, tally up how much you spend on meals per person in your household starting on Friday at noon through Saturday dinner and do the same thing.

Other ways to feed and shelter, sponsor a child through Compassion International- an organization where you give money to a child so that they can get an education, medical needs, food for the family and more. Plus you get the joy of sending letters and watching them all while you are living out this command of this passage. .We are called to go out and to serve to be a sent people because of the grace we have experienced in Christ not just to “earn salvation” and get into heaven. Notice in our passage the people do the work of Christ without even realizing it are those whose service simply flows from their hearts as they feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and so on.

The righteous have entered into the kingdom of heaven because they have shown themselves worthy by their kind deeds, not just because they said the right words. Christ paid the price for us by his blood on the cross and he alone has the right to sit in judgment and to open the gates of heaven to all who not only believe in him but have loved his creation as his own- meaning those who have taken care of the poor, the needy, fought for those who couldn't fight for themselves. We know that there is mercy in judgment for the one who sits in judgment over the world is the one who died for the human race, and therefore judgment is always given through the lens of grace. This is an uncomfortable passage of scripture, because it challenges us to wrestle with Christ's call on our own lives and it leaves us thinking deeply about our faith, our faith in practice, our relationship with the Lord of the Universe and with idea of heave and hell. We are uncomfortable because this passage challenges our belief that we are saved simply by grace alone. Are you uncomfortable, we all should be! Yes, Salvation is through the grace and works of Christ but we can't rest on simply saying the “right words” we are called to go out and serve and to be the hands and feet of Christ to a broken and hurting world. So how are you going to be a sheep today and always, seek out Christ's calling to go and serve and then just do it!