

November 22, 2020 Sermon
Matthew 25:31-46

Are you a sheep? A goat? Do you know? Does it matter to you?
I'm not sure it really matters whether or not you're a sheep or a goat, because according to today's gospel lesson, if you are either one, you are considered clueless.

A couple days before sitting down with this scripture, I was sent a message by a local administrator in the office of the Boy Scouts of America. In case you didn't know, our congregation sponsors a Boy Scout Troop. I have managed to stay out of that area of church-life, partly because it's Boy Scouts (and honestly, I don't know much about the Boy Scouts OR the Girl Scouts), and partly because I figure if it *ain't* broke, and I don't see blood or hear screaming, then things must be going smoothly. I do know if things were NOT running smoothly, I would know.

This administrator was persistent with me. It was felt there was a need for me to discuss the charter so I would know what was happening in our troop. I did my very best to get out of the conversation. I directed this person to our contact in the congregation that has always taken care of passing information to the Boy Scout leader. I even made the comment that all I usually do is sign my name on a form and things continue to go on. *Then I read today's gospel lesson and felt as if I was a direct descendant of the "Goats at the Left Hand of God Society."*

I immediately picked up the phone and called to see what it was I needed to do as the pastor of the church that was sponsoring a Boy Scout troop. I simply didn't realize I was being a goat by trying to weasel my way out of things. (Weasels have nothing to do with today's gospel lesson.) Here was God, tapping me on the shoulder, nudging me to become more involved with the Boy Scouts, and I was missing that subtle tap.

The administrator and I went over the charter. Questions were asked. Questions were answered. Knowledge was gained, and I felt a little less like a goat...that wasn't the goal I had when I picked up the phone. I responded because God was tapping me on the shoulder with this piece of scripture...asking me to do more...to show love...to see what I might be able to do for the least of these...to have more involvement than a simple signature would afford.

This is Christ the King Sunday...the last Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. The start of a *new* church year. A possible new beginning in what seems to be a tired, old world. A time when we start to think about the kingdom of God being found in a tiny child, born in a stinky old stable.

So, what a better time to take a look at what we're doing as a people? What better time is there to determine if we belong on the sheep side of the fence, or if we belong with the goats. Are we helping others see the presence of God in Christ or are we doing things in a way that only brings praise and pride to ourselves? The true presence of Christ is when the least of us experience the abundance of God here and now.

What is it that you have done, that has helped the *least* experience the abundance of God?

Jesus says, "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." Jesus also said, "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."

"Ahh," you say, "We're in the middle of a pandemic, just what is it that we can do? We're not allowed to go anywhere, so we can't buy things for others. We're not allowed to be with people we haven't seen for a long time. We can't go to movies or hang out at malls or go shopping for fun. We can't hug anyone, or go to a crowded restaurant, and those masks??? I tell you they give us claustrophobia, and dry lips, and bad breath, and we just can't quite see beyond this."

We Lutherans *love* to say we are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, and we are, BUT what if we're also saved by how we *treat* other people? What if we are saved by *works* that help shape *justice* for all people? What if helping the *least* is *more* than just feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, and offering a drink to the thirsty? What would happen if we simply *gave* to the least without question about how deserving they are, or without questioning how they paid for the tattoo on their earlobe, or judging the family from which they come?

What about those people in *prison*? What do we know about *them*? I don't mean personally, but are they treated in a humane and just way? Have you *visited* anyone in prison? Have you *helped* anyone in prison with something as simple as a prayer? Are they in prison because they did something *wrong* or, are they there because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Most everyone has respect for our service people, our military leaders, our police; but everyone should be held accountable for what they do. Is this, helping part of the least, by holding those in charge accountable for their actions, as they hold others accountable for theirs? Shouldn't speaking *up* for the *least* be part of being the *face* of Christ?

The world is a messy place to live. It's *hard*, sometimes, to know what's right and what isn't. It's *hard* to stand up for beliefs that *may* not be the beliefs of someone else, but *God* is here in all of it. *God* is here to *point* us to the least, the vulnerable, the marginalized.

Do you want to be the sheep and not the goat? Take a good look within yourself. Think about what it is you *do* and *when*. Do you feel the need to announce to others every time you've helped someone? If so, then there's probably not a lot of Jesus in there. Remember, when Jesus did things he most always told his disciples to tell no one! Jesus wants us to act in a way that lets others know we are part of him, and so we act without thought of ourselves, but with love and humility in our hearts.

During this pandemic, there are plenty of ways to help the least. I've seen school teachers reach out on social media platforms to request financial help for their items to assist students. There are people in hospital ICUs in need of prayer. Doctors and nurses are in need of comfort and encouragement. There are those who are out of work right now, in need of groceries and help with electric bills and rent. If you *know* of someone like this, there is no better way to be the face of Jesus than to help them. Your act could even be something as simple as sending a card or a note.

Get involved in your local food pantry, send money to help others all over the world. Hunger is *everywhere* and even more so, now that this virus covers the earth. Lutheran World Relief will always accept a donation in any amount.

God is with us! God in Christ says, "Hooray for those who do things for others without thinking about themselves!" "Hooray for those who can lift up the poor in spirit and offer hope to those who have none!" This is the kingdom of God for which we are working. This is how we live in the kingdom of God NOW, as we wait for the kingdom that *is* to come!

These are rough times, and there may be rougher times ahead, but part of living in God's kingdom right now, is showing our love for others, and there's really no better time than right now, today, to do just that. Who knows, helping others may be just what we need to take our minds off the rough times!

Pray for good health for all. Pray that the vaccines will work. Wear your mask to protect those around you. Do your part to help virus levels go down. Do it for the ***least*** of these, because there have been times when we were *all* considered to be the least.

Jesus says, "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." So, if you feel a tap on your shoulder, don't be a goat! Rise to the call! Amen.