

Last Sunday 11/23/14
Matthew 25:31-46 29A

‘COME, YOU WHO ARE BLESSED BY MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.’

When Christ the King comes in all of His glory, all the angels from heaven will come with Him. He will sit on His glorious throne and the angels will gather all the nations before Him and He will separate the people as a shepherd separates his sheep. The sheep will be gathered on His right and the goats on His left. And Christ the King will say to the sheep on His right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. FOR...” “FOR ...” Come on you Lutherans, finish the sentence. We Lutherans are bold to say something quite theological, like “FOR ... by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2).” All the sheep would agree that is a good answer, except for one thing -- that’s not what the King says. The King 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.”

Wow! We little lambs can get our wool in a bundle over those words of the King. After all, wasn’t it the King Himself who boldly proclaimed, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (Jn 3:16).” Yes, Christ the King did say that. He makes it clear that it all comes down to believing. If

you want to have eternal life, if you want to enter the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, you have to believe in the King Jesus.

So, now, when the King says that you will inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, if you make someone a sandwich, give the thirsty a cold Coke, give the shirt off your back to your neighbor who needs it, shovel the snow from your neighbor's driveway, it unsettles us a little. How can say the King say in John 3:16, "Whoever believes in Him shall never perish," and when He comes in glory say, "Come, you who blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" for, because you did this and you did that? One place, the King says, "believe," and now in another, it sounds like He is saying, "Do, do, do." So, we ask that Lutheran question: What does this mean?

Sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock, I call this to your attention because, sometimes, it appears to our human reason that the Bible contradicts itself. And let's never forget the lies of Satan to cast doubt on what God says in His Word. But to understand the Bible, we must remember that Scripture interprets Scripture.

In our lesson, Jesus is addressing the relationship between faith and works. Yes, we are saved by faith alone. The Bible says,

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph 2)."

And again, the Bible says,

"We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified (Ga 2)."

We are not saved by good works. Good works do not, in any way, contribute to our salvation; our good works do not earn God's grace; our good works do not make us more pleasing to God. Good works are a fruit of our faith. They are evidence, proof, that we are alive by faith in Christ. St. James says it this way, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (2:17)."

I'm going to say something profound. Ready? Here it goes: Apple trees produce apples. Just as apple trees produce apples, so in Christ, we produce the fruits of faith. By doing the works of Christ, we show that we are one with Him by faith, we live in Him and He lives in us.

And on the other side of the coin, those who do not believe in Him cannot do anything before God that He considers a good work, because they remain dead in sin. The goats, those on his left, had no faith. And the Bible teaches us, "Without faith it is impossible to please God (He 11:6)." This is why He says to them, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

But, you will never hear those words. You are the sheep of His pasture. You are the ones who believe in Him. You were sinful, unclean, you sinned against God and your neighbor in your thoughts, words, and deeds. So, the king came in the flesh. He lived a perfect life, in order to fulfill the Law's demands for you. And because you had not lived a perfect life in accordance with the Commandments, He took your sins upon Himself and went to Calvary's cross where He suffered, bled, and died for you. He rose the 3rd day, to proclaim to you that all of your sins are forgiven, you are an heir of heaven, you are one of His sheep.

And He delivered all of that to you in the Water and Word of God in your baptism, in the preaching of the Word of God, in Holy Absolution, and

in Holy Communion, where He gives you His body and blood to eat and to drink.

That is who you are – one who stands on His right, one who is heir of the kingdom prepared for you. One who is a sheep of the Good Shepherd's flock. As a sheep, it means there are implications here and now, for your life today.

Yes, the King is with us always, to the very end of the age. But, He is not here in the flesh, physically present, so we cannot see Him hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison. So, how can we feed Him, give Him something to drink, welcome Him, clothe Him, and come to Him to be His friend?

Well, the King tells us, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." We care for our fellow sheep, those who find themselves hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or in prison, especially for their faith in Jesus. We come to them with food, shelter, clothing, medical care, love. God doesn't need our good works, but our fellow sheep do, so God serves your neighbor through you.

An apple tree gives no thought to producing apples at all; it just does it. So you, living in Christ, as one of His sheep, produce fruits, simply because of who you are in Christ Jesus.

You have faith and that faith will save you. And, that faith is active in works, works of love, works of mercy, works like feeding, welcoming, visiting, clothing your neighbor.

So, whether you are feeding the hungry, working a job and providing for your family, loving your spouse and your children, or simply being a friend to your neighbor, the King will say to you on the Last Day, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you

from the foundation of the world,” because all that you have done is through faith in Jesus Christ.