

Matthew 25:31-46
“How Did We Respond To Human Need?”
#2 Church Functions: Witness
WRCOB 11.21.21

Jesus ends his teaching ministry
With the parable we read this morning.

In the Gospel of Matthew
Jesus begins his ministry
With the Sermon on the Mount in Ch 5.

And Jesus completes his ministry with this parable in Ch 25.

Following this teaching
Matthew moves into the events leading up to the cross.

The Sermon on the Mount
And the Parable of the Sheep and Goats
Are fitting bookends to Jesus' life and ministry.

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Our parable takes place at the close of history.

The Judeo/Christian tradition views history as linear.

It has a beginning and an end.

And it is God who initiated the beginning
And it is God who will initiate the end.

Our parable points to the Day of Judgement
When Jesus, the Son of Man returns
After taking his rightful place on heaven's throne

All of humanity will be gathered before him.

Believers and unbelievers, Catholics, and Jews
Mormons, Baptists, and Brethren
Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims
Atheists, agnostics, and the “nones”

Everyone who ever lived on earth
Will stand before the throne

Jesus is the Judge
And the court is now in session.

No one escapes judgment.

The Son of Man will separate all people that has ever lived
Simply into two groups.

Jesus likens the groups to sheep and goats.

There is no graduated classification system here
You're either in or you're out.

And then there will be, as Fred Craddock declares
The ultimate, unambiguous and complete moment of truth.

According to this passage
People will be judged based on one criterion.

One!

Based on that one criterion
Jesus will divide all of humanity into 2 groups.

Those Jesus calls blessed will enter paradise.

Those Jesus curses will depart into eternal fire.

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Now mind you, this is Jesus' teaching lesson!

There is no soft, warm and fuzzy Jesus here!

Due to its position at the end of Jesus' ministry
As harsh as it may be

We cannot deny that Jesus sees this parable
As perhaps his most important lesson.

We should take heed!

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Today, we discuss the second function of the church

“Witness”

Last week I introduced a sermon series
On the three main functions of the church:

1

1. Nurture: caring for those within the circle of faith
2. Witness: caring for those outside the circle of faith
3. Stewardship: caring for the gifts God blessed us with.

Last week we looked at Nurture
And broke Nurture down into three parts.

Here they are with their Greek counterparts.

2

1. Worship—Liturgia

2. Education—Didache
3. Fellowship—Koinonia

This week we look at Witness.

Witness, caring for those outside the circle of faith
Can be broken down into 2 areas

3

- Service—Diakonia
- Proclamation—Kerygma

Jesus taught a servant style of leadership
When he kneeled to wash his disciples' feet.

The Greek word diakonia means to “wait tables”.

It is where we get the word deacon.

Jesus teaches that disciples are to emulate him.

4

John 13:14-15 NLT

¹⁴ And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

Brethren are globally recognized for its service ministries.

For a small denomination we have done much
To assist the needy and marginalized.

Service is a very clear and direct mandate
That Brethren take seriously.

Its lesson is found throughout the pages of the Bible.

For example

5

James 2:14-16 NLT

¹⁴ What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?

6

¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

The understanding here is that entry into God's kingdom
Is not solely based on belief in Christ as Savior.

Faith must manifest itself in neighbor love.

Nor is salvation based solely on
One's personal piety and holy living.

True salvation, according to this lesson
Is based on embodying the Greatest Commandment!

Loving God and neighbor with all your heart.

It is the essence of everything Jesus teaches us!

In our Scripture Lesson today
We discover one of the rare places in the Bible

Where people are punished
Not by what they **did**
But by what they **didn't** do!

7

James 4:17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

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The second part of Church Witness is proclamation.

Not only are we to care for the needs
Of those outside the circle of faith

We are also to give testimony to why we do what we do.

Peter writes in his letter.

8

1 Peter 3:15 CEV

**¹⁵ Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life.
Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks
you about your hope.**

We are called to be witnesses for Jesus Christ
To share the hope we have in the Gospel.

We proclaim Jesus as Lord.

We believe God sent Christ to redeem and reclaim us.

9

John 3:16 NIV

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Our understanding is that

In and through Jesus, love conquers all things.

10

1 John 4:10 NIV

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

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Jesus challenges his followers

By asking deep and probing questions.

In fact, I would love to do a sermon series sometime

On the questions Jesus asks us.

Like . . .

11

Mark 8:29 CEV Then Jesus asked . . . who do you say I am?"

Or this one.

12

Mark 8:36-37 NIV What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷ Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

And this one.

13

Luke 6:46 NRSV "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"

The questions Jesus asks his followers

Challenges them

To a deeper faith and a stronger witness.

And now, here, as Jesus closes his ministry
He challenges his followers with one final question.

Perhaps the question above all questions.

It is not the question we ask of baptismal candidates.

*Do you believe that Jesus is God's Son and do you receive
and trust him as your Lord and Savior.*

It is not the question Jesus asks
When he said to Martha

14

John 11:25-26 NIV Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Absolutely essential questions for sure!

But it's not the question Jesus asked.

In the final scenario
When it's all said and done
When we all stand before the Judge
On the Day of Reckoning.

On the final exam, Jesus asks only one question.

The question might surprise you.

This is the question as Fred Craddock poses it

15 “How did you respond to human need?”

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I am alone

My spouse died and I have no one left

Have you stopped by to keep me company?

I am hunkered down with my family

Hungry and cold and scared

Alongside your border with no place to go

Did you welcome me?

I am a young black man

Found guilty by an all-white jury

For a crime I didn't commit

Did you come to visit me?

I live in the violence-wracked neighborhood in your city

I am a homeless veteran with PTSD

I am addicted to opioids

I live with schizophrenia

I crouch in the shadow of your doorway

And the question on the final exam asks

Did we do anything to help?

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We witness to the great love God has for the world

By word (proclamation) and by deed (service)

We nurture those within the circle of faith

And we witness to those outside the circle of faith.

We are called to give testimony to the hope we have
In a world with little hope..

How will we respond to human need?

The answer to that question
According to Jesus
Has eternal consequences.