**Matthew 25:31-46 (ESV)**

**31**  “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. **32** Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. **34** Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35** 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, **36**  I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? **38** And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? **39** And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ **41** “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. **42** For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, **43** 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.’ **44** Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ **45** Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ **46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**“The Kingdom Prepared For You”**

“Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:4) Jesus Christ the king of glory and our good shepherd. Amen. Like two ships passing in the night, the culture and church shared commonality on Thanksgiving. Blessings for life still abound and all should be grateful. Now that goodness celebrated over creation sails off in two different directions. One has started full swing into the Christmas season, while the other comes to a standstill on this Last Sunday of the Church Year. For all the cycles of life, repetitions of seasons, and routine of things in a day. These patterns at the present will be unimportant on that great and final Day of the Lord.

A recent comic I came across showed a person standing at the gates of heaven. The angel said, “I was going to let you in until I looked at what you posted on Facebook.” Humorous, but nothing like what Jesus describes about the sheep and the goats. Regardless if someone coasted through life on his or her terms. All will stand before Jesus falling into two categories. Those who believed in the king and those who rejected this good shepherd. Rather than focusing on the individual, the picture by Jesus shows a flock or His Church that receives final validation from Him. We look forward to the Day of our Lord, because Jesus keeps His promise to defend, affirm, and raise up His sheep while the goats are left with no good.

1. **Look forward to the good day of defense that comes from Jesus to any who believe in Him.**
2. Notice the king first speaks to the sheep because they need Him.

* His words were a declaration extending comfort to the weary.
* They were called, “blessed” because bearing crosses before goats meant they had to live by faith and not their works.
* The promise had always been there for them to, “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”
* In other words, eternal salvation is a gift that

these sheep never could give themselves.

1. Jesus will judge between sheep and goats, but the king desires above all to first to speak to save sinners.

* This is the proclamation going out into the world by Word and Sacrament of a repentant life that believes in the Gospel.
* Since the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are under a sinful curse, the blessed fact of crosses is how God has worked all good for us.
* The promise from Jesus remains, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18).
* Since Jesus gave Himself up as the perfect sacrifice, the gift is to believe God’s justifying love saves sinners that are His sheep.

1. **Look forward to the good day of affirmation that comes from Jesus for works done in faith were never worthless.**
2. The king saw life lived out for what it truly was before Him.

* Activities by the sheep to others were actually a glorious service, but the worthiness of their work they never considered.
* Matter a fact, the menial task of their work made the sheep surprisingly ask, “Lord, when did we see you?”
* Only the goats sought to praise their works as a way to justify their place before the king who already separated them from the sheep.
* Yet, their actions were never based on faith and so there was nothing good and the king only saw the offense of what they did.

1. Jesus sees our cruciform lives, but how can we know what we do He will consider at last good?

* To begin with, what drives the work of the baptized is faith in Christ making works not for salvation but a benefit for our neighbor.
* St. John proclaims, “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)
* This justified love from Jesus means being concerned less about quantity and more about quality, which means service in view of the cross.
* Since it is to “one of the least of these my brothers,” the suffering matter to Jesus and the mercy of love “to one” He praises as good.

1. **Look forward to the good day of being raised to eternal life that comes from Jesus, which is as great as heaven and hell.**
2. The king by His judgment draws His sheep closer, but the goats He sends away.

* What God intended to be only for the devil and his angels becomes the permanent residence of wicked unbelievers that reject Him.
* Hell was never the plan, but the goats only mimicked the works not the true faith that came from being a sheep.
* Our Lutherans Fathers note the distinction, “without faith and Christ as Mediator, good works do not please…” (ACC Article III). They even harden hearts against him!
* Rather than repent, the goats tried to get their way, but the sheep had the greater glory for this king is also their shepherd.

1. Jesus draws His church together, because eternal life was always the plan.

* The description made by Jesus of His glorious return was only days before He went to die.
* He prepares any for His eternal kingdom by drawing us ultimately to His cross where the good shepherd has died for the sheep.
* Christ softens hearts now by Word and Sacrament, so His flock has the comfort, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”
* Entering into eternal life is because Jesus’ reigns and eyes of faith stay fixed upon the home of righteousness He has built for us.

The Last Sunday of the Church Year tells us not to run off so fast with the culture. Changing season cannot compare to the Coming of Christ. Busyness of life will come to a stop before this king. As the world rallies together today in ways we cannot fathom or even control, take heart and be bold in mercy to any. One separation will still happen, but sin, death, and the devil have nothing to do with it. We look forward to the Day of our Lord, because Jesus keeps His promise to defend, affirm, and raise up His sheep while the goats are left with no good. Amen. Now the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.