

*He Slipped In, Did You See?*  
Christ the King Sunday  
Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46  
November 23, 2008

<sup>NRS</sup> **Ephesians 1:5** He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, <sup>12</sup> so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; <sup>14</sup> this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. <sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup> so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup> God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. <sup>22</sup> And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Matthew 25:31** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and

gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup> And the king will answer them, '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.' <sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, '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.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This passage from Matthew 25 is known as the Great Judgment! It is the final passage that comes at us with this powerful sense of urgency. Act now, the words suggest. Now is the time to act before Jesus is taken in the Garden of Gethsemane, is arrested, brutally tortured, mocked, given a trial in a kangaroo court, and finally marched to the hill of Calvary where he was raised up in disgrace and public humiliation as a criminal alongside two convicted felons. Act now, before it is too late! The hour is coming when he won't be here as teacher and healer, leader and source of inspiration and hope.

Urgency increased with the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. With only five wise enough to be ready for the coming of the

master, the other five were foolish and would be left out of the wedding banquet. Wisdom cannot be shared with fools. And the wisdom of God is foolishness to Greek, Jew and Gentile alike.

Then last week, the story of the parable of the talents shocked us. The temptation facing every disciple is to be overly cautious and recklessly conservative so as to be unprepared for the return of the Master. While there is no difference between the five and two-talent servant, since both are rewarded in the same way and each is equally given more responsibility because of their faithfulness in risking and obtaining more value for the wealth entrusted to them. The one-talent servant is condemned in the harshest terms, even though he has done right in the eyes of society. It was a sound and safe practice to bury your money somewhere. But, it was the one talent-servant who failed to act on the urgent demand of the Master to do something worthwhile and possibly enhance the value of what was entrusted to him. The one-talent servant was lazy and slothful, spiritually inept at carrying out the responsibility of a disciple to share the Good News. So, he is totally rejected in the

most vivid terms, cast into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth – a place of rejection and separation from the Master.

Today, the King, who is the same as the Master, is enthroned and returning to judge the faithfulness of the servants. Are they acting according to his wishes or not? Separating the faithful from the unfaithful is likened to putting sheep on the right and goats on the left. While both are animals with a good purpose in life, the sheep distinguish the honor of being on the favored side. On the other hand, the left hand, often regarded as not good, even sinister, is the place where the goats are placed. To those on his right he bestows blessing; and to the ones on his left, he curses.

Listening to this story, you can't help but ask, "where will I be viewed in this Great Judgment?" Actions speak louder than words. The acts betray the heart. Acting in compassions and mercy reveals the presence of the Master's heart and mind in the servant. Their acts to do six basic tasks reflect the ancient requirement of the Lord articulated in the book of the prophet Micah. "***He has told***

*you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"* (Micah 6:8)

The **criteria** for separating the good from the bad were determined by a simple measuring rod of righteousness. *To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God* is translated into **six simple faithful acts** of discipleship: what the Lord requires is to show loving concern for the *least of those among us*. **Food, drink, welcome, clothing, nursing care, and visitation** -- "*These good deeds are called 'deeds of loving-kindness' (gemilut hasadim) in rabbinic literature... (and) are typical of those found in Old Testament lists (Deut. 15:7-11; Isa. 58:7-10; Pss. 37:21; 41:1...) and other ancient Jewish sources"* (Hultgren, 151).

Is it so easy to judge our actions as righteous or not? God's love is in the heart; but the genuine works of Christ reveal the love that is offered to the least of those among us. These six categories **are not the only ways** that we offer love and mercy. Encouraging

others who are in despair, working in a transportation pool to help people get to work or the doctor, volunteering with children in school who are struggling, giving time to listen to the hurts and wounds of another, buying food for Lamb's Basket, repairing homes of those without money, opening the doors of the church to everyone who needs a place to gather, extending ESL to the immigrant community, sharing Thanksgiving meals with those whose spouse has died and left them alone, and more and more ways that only God knows are acts of mercy and love.

The problem is this. We often are too tired from work and duties of home to care and to help. We are in a rush to go to meetings. We are just about out of money and cannot find more to give. We are just tired of all the good causes that hound us. We feel the need to close in the walls and protect our own, excluding the masses of others as too demanding and too many to help. We are often overwhelmed. This is the gist of Michael Quoist's poem, *Lord, Why did you tell me to Love?*  
*Lord, why did you tell me to love all men, my brothers?*  
*I have tried, but I come back to you, frightened...*

*Lord, I was so peaceful at home, I was so comfortably settled.*  
*It was well-furnished, and I felt cozy.*  
*I was alone, I was at peace,*  
*Sheltered from the wind and the rain, kept clean.*  
*I would have stayed unsullied in my ivory tower.*  
*But, Lord, you have discovered a breach in my defenses.*

*You have forced me to open my door.  
Like a squall of rain in the face, the cry of men has awakened me;  
Like a gale of wind a friendship has shaken me,  
Stealing in like a shaft of light, your grace has disturbed me.  
Rashly enough, I left my door ajar. Now, Lord, I am lost!  
Outside, men were lying in wait for me.  
I did not know they were so near; in this house, in this street, in  
this office; my neighbor, my colleague, my friend.  
As soon as I started to open the door I saw them, with outstretched  
hands, anxious eyes, longing hearts, like beggars on church steps.  
The first came in, Lord. There was, after all, a bit of space in my  
heart.  
I welcomed them. I would have cared for them and fondled them,  
my very own little lambs, my little flock.  
You would have been pleased, Lord: I would have served and  
honored you in a proper, respectable way.  
Until then, it was sensible...  
But the next ones, Lord, the other men—I had not seen them; they  
were hidden behind the first ones.  
There were more of them. They were wretched; they overpowered  
me without warning.  
We had to crowd in, I had to find room for them.*

*Now they have come from all over in successive waves, pushing  
one another, jostling one another  
They have come from all over town, from all parts of the country,  
of the world; numberless, inexhaustible.  
They don't come alone any longer but in groups, bound one to  
another.  
They come bending under heavy loads; loads of injustice, of  
resentment and hate, of suffering and sin...  
They drag the world behind them, with everything rusted, twisted,  
badly adjusted.*

*Lord, they hurt me! They are in the way, they are all over.*

*They are too hungry; they are consuming me!  
I can't do anything any more; as they come in, they push the door,  
and the door opens wider...  
Ah, Lord! My door is wide open!  
I can't stand it any more! It's too much! It's no kind of a life!  
    What about my job?  
    My family?  
    My peace?  
    My liberty?  
    And me?  
Ah, Lord! I have lost everything; I don't belong to myself any  
longer;  
There's no more room for me at home.*

This poem reflects life as we know it all too well. Every day of every week our round the clock news on CNN inform us of the tragedies of life from tsunamis in Indonesia, to fires in California, to economic meltdown in Europe, India, the far East, North and South America and right next door where our neighbor has lost his job and has no more health insurance and cannot pay the utilities. What do they do? How can we help our neighbor? Are we really our brother's keeper? What does that mean? The shelves of Lamb's Basket are almost always bare after a few hours of distribution. The discretionary fund goes quickly to save a few. It

never ends. This impacts us and wears us down. This is what is known as “compassion fatigue!” Our generosity and our willingness is tested to the limits; and we are tired of being tired of feeling guilty of not doing enough.

Does that sound like an excuse to run and to hide? Where is God when we have run so low on compassion and a spirit of caring for our neighbor? Where is that something extra that is in God alone?

Quoist’s poem answers this haunting and terrifyingly real question like this:

*Don’t worry, God says, you have gained all,  
While men came in to you,  
I, your Father,  
I, your God,  
Slipped in among them.*

There is a test question that can help us test ourselves. How can you tell God is here? The answer is, “***But anyone who does not love does not know God-- for God is love.***”<sup>NLT</sup> (1 John 4:8)

Who, then, do we see in those desperate faces and anguished voices? Is it Jesus? How do you know it's him? Do we recognize Christ in the face of the child without clothes on the dump heap in Cambodia? Do we recognize Christ inside the prison on death row? Do we recognize Christ in the stranger from another land who can't speak our language? Do we recognize Christ in the face of a mother on the streets with no job, no home, no one to take her in? Do we recognize Christ in the face of an addict that comes to the church for support and healing? Do we recognize Christ in the face of a person who has done the time in prison and is let out but can't find a job or a place to live or people to accept him? Where is he?

He, the king of kings, **slipped in, did you see?** Are you ready to see and to accept and to welcome him? See with your eyes enlightened the hope in which we are called, his *immeasurable greatness of his power* reflected back to us.(Ephesians 1:18, 19)

We do not need to be afraid. He is here among the least, the last, and the lost. Do you see him? Relax. Let him in through the door

with all the rest of the masses of the world clamoring for justice  
and mercy, love and hope.