

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Trinity  
18 November, Anno Domini 2018  
St. Matthew 25:31-46  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The eternal Lord views time eternally. But we, who watch the seconds tick by, who are constantly terrified by the “end” - of the day, of a period of life, of the youth of our children, of our life - are impatient and can't rest in God's patience. We mistake God's patience for slowness or laziness and maybe even failure.

We suffer the ravages of sin and want it to be over...right now. We're tired of watching wild fires consume lives and property. We're tired of anxiously waiting for the government to finally decide (as others have) that God's Word is hate speech and to come and shut down our churches. We're tired of arguments, hatred, and division. We're tired of suffering not only under our own sins but also suffering others sins against us. We're even tired of just the day-to-day. We're exhausted. We want our crosses to be lifted. We long for days of comfort and ease.

But they haven't been. Not yet. Because God wants to save people. He has more in sight than just you. He keeps providing for the preaching of His Word so that other people, all people, hear and have the opportunity to repent and look in faith upon their Savior. He is patient because He is filled with love and desires that none be lost to eternal judgment. He will take no pleasure in seeing the goats there on His left. Because they don't have to be there. He died for them just as He died for you. He has told them what He has done for them and shown them the way that leads to eternal life. He weeps over them as He weeped over Jerusalem. He saved them, He spilled His Blood for them, but they refuse His love and His forgiveness.

As of right now, the Lord has not yet returned. And so the opportunity for repentance remains...for the moment. Don't be deceived. The Lord's patience

will come to an end. The Lord WILL return and it will come suddenly, when we don't expect it. And it will be traumatic. All that now exists will be consumed by fire. And the books will be opened. The truth will be known. The thoughts and the intentions of the heart will be exposed. And what will not matter is whether your name was found on the roster of a church. What will not matter is if you worked hard, if you got good grades and scholarships and trophies, if you fit in and had lots of friends, if your house is clean, if you were fit and trim, if you fulfilled your life's dreams and accomplished your goals. Truth be told, if these are the concerns of your heart, beware. They will likely be your eternal downfall. These things are all about you and glorifying yourself. They are not of faith. They neither prove nor strengthen faith. God isn't blinded by such useless shiny trinkets.

What will matter is whether or not your heart trusts alone in the Lord Jesus Christ for every good, really, whether or not the Lord Jesus Christ IS your every good. This, and this alone, is faith - that your only source of hope and peace is Jesus. Faith is being assured that while you have done everything deserving of eternal death, yet, for the sake of the Blood of God's Son, your sin and guilt have been taken away and that in Christ through Holy Baptism you have been made a child of God. Faith is the despising of world and self so that you might have what is offered to you in Jesus. Faith sets aside all earthly wisdom and reason, abandons all attempts to earn salvation through good works, and instead trusts only in the Body given and the Blood shed on Mt. Calvary and now given to God's children as true food and drink.

Only when that is true, only when every other earthly prop gives way, can you actually bear the fruits which we hear of in Matthew 25. If we don't actually believe the Lord when He says that every inclination of our hearts is evil from our youth, then we will believe that we are good. If we don't actually believe that Jesus' Blood is completely sufficient for our forgiveness and eternal salvation, then we will try to cover the insufficiency with our own work. If we don't actually believe the Lord when He says that we are daily under threat from spiritually enemies within and without, then we won't stay awake and on guard against sin, and our real enemies, the ones who are not of flesh and

blood, will gain the victory and drag us into eternal damnation. If we can hear the living Word of God read and preached and remain unaffected, neither convicted nor comforted, then our hearts have grown cold to the voice of our Father and the working of the Holy Spirit. If we do not feel the need to pray to our Father in heaven, if we do not long for and hunger for the gifts He gives which bring with them the promise of forgiveness, then we will most certainly not look upon the most broken among us with mercy and compassion. We can't love if we haven't first drunk deeply of the Father's love for us which is only found in Jesus.

The goats did lots of good things, to be sure. But they only did them in order that they could be rewarded by man and, maybe, by God. They sought praise. They sought acknowledgment. They sought to tip the balance of justice so that their good works outweighed the bad. They sought to feel good about themselves. And maybe they did...for a time. But when the fiery judgment of God comes down on earth, works born of unbelief will be revealed and no one will have any reason to feel good about himself and what he has done. It will be seen that the works of the goats were done to exclusion of Jesus. The goats trusted their works to save them rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Their works were chosen on the basis of maximum benefit. Either help those who are able to help you or use your neighbor as stepping stone to exalt yourself in God's eyes. And certainly, if the goats had seen the glorified Jesus that now sits on His throne, they most certainly would have done everything they could to ingratiate themselves to Him. But God hates such works. They are filled with pride and arrogance and self-love.

True love of your neighbor and thus truly good works can only flow from faith - from the joyful assurance that God has looked upon you in mercy and saved you, not for His own benefit but for yours. He has gladly done this, offering His life as a payment so that you might be His and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness and innocence and blessedness. This is love that we sinners can't possibly conjure up in ourselves. We can't simply choose to love as God loves - perfectly, wholly, absolutely selflessly. If we are still under the demonic lie that God will save

only those who show themselves worthy by their good deeds, then the thought of Christ's return for judgment can only be terrifying because the trumpet sound of God's judgment is everywhere and the clock is ticking. Time is running out. "Have I done enough to be counted among the sheep. Have I helped the right neighbors enough to sit at Jesus' right hand? I can think of a ton of neighbors whom I haven't helped, whom I refused to help."

Truly godly, Christian love is a natural by-product of faith in Jesus Christ. Certain of our Lord's forgiveness and mercy, our eyes are immediately turned out to find others, like ourselves, who are weak and broken and in need of the same love of God. The Holy Spirit, not the Christian himself, moves the Christian out toward his neighbor who is caught in his own sin and brokenness, who suffers the ravages of this broken world. Confident in his inheritance of God's kingdom because of the grace of Holy Baptism, the Christian desires to alleviate the suffering that he finds sheerly for the sake of the one suffering. He's not looking to serve Jesus because Jesus doesn't need serving. And notice the examples that our Lord uses - the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner. Helping such as these won't bring you glory. These are the ones the world would toss aside. They can't give you anything in return. But what do you need? You have God Almighty as your Father. You have the absolution of the Son of Man, the judge who will sit on the throne, and with it the promise of salvation and eternal life. Is there something, anything, more that you need?

If you heard today's Gospel and began recounting the good and the bad things you've done, stop. Repent. Stop looking at your works. They can't save you. But the Son of Man can. The Son of Man has. Before He ascended the throne of judgment He ascended the judgement throne of the cross to receive in His own flesh the guilty verdict that stands against you. There the gavel of judgment fell against Jesus and the entire worthless pile of your evil, loveless works was burned up under the wrath of God. Jesus is the one who loved the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner and delivered you. Jesus has fed you with righteousness, welcomed you into His kingdom, clothed you with Baptism, healed you of death, and delivered you

from damnation. You have received all these things freely from the hand of Christ and He continues to proclaim to you His love and forgiveness and even give you the pledge of His Body and Blood to comfort and assure you that He has made you a sheep.

“Your Savior paid the debt you owe and for your sin was smitten; within the Book of Life please know, O Baptized, that your name has now been written. Do not doubt for you are free and Satan cannot threaten thee; for you, in Jesus, there is no condemnation!”

In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.