

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

There is something about our gospel reading this morning that evokes a wealth of emotions; thinking of separation and eternal punishment can make people squirm, thinking about a reckoning can make one very uncomfortable. Wondering what we have neglected might make us feel indicted, even convicted, wondering if we have lived our faith? Maybe it's not just goats that neglect the least of these, Jesus' brothers and sisters.

So are you feeling uncomfortable? If so, good, because Jesus wants us to feel that way. Our lives on earth and our lives to come are not trivial matters, our King died for us, a sacrifice not made lightly. So here in these verses we are confronted and convicted.

We ask ourselves who are the sheep and who are the goats? We ask ourselves, who are we? Notice that all of the sheep and all of the goats asked the same question: "Lord, when was it...?" When you think about that for a moment, we find another emotion. Do you realize there's something terribly sad in the question "Lord, when was it...?"

Do you realize judgment is directly connected to reaching out to the "least of these"? The goats were condemned for the good they did not do. They had their reasons for hanging on to their treasures and talents, not caring about those who needed care. But reasons for not caring just aren't going to cut it because you can't sit out being involved, engaged with the least of these brothers and sisters.

Now I'm not going to shout "get out there and get involved" nor am I going to tell you to "do some good things" and save yourself from the coming judgment. I'm sure it would probably be a great sermon but you get those from me all the time.

Now do you remember that I said there's something terribly sad in the question "Lord, when was it...?" So what's so sad? Think about the sheep, those at Jesus' right hand, the place we want to be, they have only one thing to say, "Lord, when...?" Think about what they lost, think of what we will have lost if we ask that question. Think of the pain inherent in that question. They have missed seeing the Lord. They haven't seen the presence of God, hidden or not, in the faces of those they have served.

Dear friends, this story may help us to avoid that loss, we are saved by grace through faith, we serve others to please God, and because Jesus expects his disciples to serve as he served, and it is to our credit perhaps that we do so without thought of who might be seeing us, but occasionally we need to be reminded of why we care, why we serve, why we reach out. Because the truth is, if you don't look for Jesus in those we serve, you won't see him, and some of the joy is lost.

We all run the risk of getting burned out because we're not always appreciated for

our visits, our conversation, our reaching out. It can seem fruitless, but Jesus calls us to serve God in the service of our neighbors, in service to our brothers and sisters, including the least of these, and it doesn't matter in the long run if we feel appreciated or not. But it's a real call, one that is extended to each one of you, and now Jesus calls us to see him in the face of our neighbors, our brothers and sisters, those we are worship with, and those we serve in whatever capacity. To see the Lord, we must look into the face of our neighbors, all those around us, all the time, here and elsewhere. To see the Lord, we must remember what we do and why we do it, we do it because Jesus expects it, because it is pleasing to the Lord. We do it because as uncomfortable as this parable may make us feel, there is grace here, as there was in the parable of the foolish bridesmaids, as there was in the parable of the talents. Grace in that Jesus tells us what he expects, what is pleasing to him.

Dear brothers and sisters, to live a life pleasing to Jesus we must often be in prayer, prayer that we might see Jesus in all we serve, that we might see that all our service is serving him. This parable is a story of judgment, a story of our calling to serve and it is also a call to look for the presence of God even when we don't expect it, it is a call to see God.

AMEN