

McCabe United Methodist Church

You Did It For Me

Matthew 25:31-46: November 10, 2013

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Our passage from Matthew twenty-five is another one of those hard Biblical passages. It's a passage that challenges us to go beyond our comfort zones and do something that requires courage and faith . . . especially faith.

Matthew twenty-five is about the judgement day. According to this passage, this is the day when Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats or those who get into heaven and those who don't.

Have you ever thought about judgement day? It's not exactly the most pleasant topic to talk about.

My grandma Fossum used to put the fear of God in me by talking about the judgement day and how people will end up on the wrong side of heaven if they commit one of the *big five sins* as she called them: smoking, drinking, playing cards, dancing and going to the movies. I don't know where she came up with these five sins because most of them aren't mentioned in the Bible. Yet, she made it clear to me that I had better avoid these five sins if I hoped to avoid the fires of hell.

Since the days of my grandma, I've changed my thinking about judgment day. I don't believe the *big five sins* are sins. A couple of them aren't good for us, but they're not sins. They will not be a deciding factor in whether or not we get into heaven or hell.

So, what do you think? What does the '*judgement part*' of judgement day mean to you? It would be nice if we get asked a bunch of easy questions like, "**Rick, where was Jesus born? Or, who was his mother? Or, can you name the sixty-six books of the Bible? The twelve Apostles?**"

I think I'd do pretty well with those kinds of questions. I might not get them all right, but I think I could get enough to pass.

But, I'm afraid these questions won't be the questions we'll get asked. The questions, on judgement day, will be a lot harder. How we've lived our lives will be the most important. If you can, try answering these questions:

- *I was hungry . . . did you feed me?*
- *I was thirsty . . . did you give me something to drink?*
- *I was a stranger . . . did you welcome me?*
- *I was naked and I was sick . . . did you give me clothes to wear? Did you help me?*
- *I was in prison . . . did you visit me?*

Jesus said, **“Whatever you do for the least of these, you do it to me. Whatever you fail to do for the least of these, you fail to do it for me.”** On judgement day, Jesus will separate people into two groups: the sheep and the goats. Those who helped the least and the lost will be the sheep and those who didn’t will be the goats.

This is the hard part of Matthew twenty-five. It’s right here that Jesus ties or connects our salvation with how we treat or mistreat our brothers and sisters, our neighbors including the least and the lost among us.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, made the same connection between our salvation and how we live our lives when he said,

*Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.*

For John Wesley, salvation was both a personal decision and a social decision. Personally, it meant accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Socially, it meant putting our faith to work. It meant using our faith. It meant matching what we believe with how we live our lives.

A chaplain during the civil war approached a wounded soldier on the battlefield and asked if he’d like to hear a few verses from the Bible. The wounded soldier said, **“No, I’m thirsty. I’d rather have some water.”**

The chaplain gave him a drink. He repeated his question, **“Would you like to hear a few verses from the Bible?”**

“No sir,” the wounded soldier said. **“Could you put something under my head?”**

The chaplain did and again repeated his question about the Bible verses. **“No,”** the soldier replied, **“I’m cold. Could you cover me up?”**

The chaplain took off his coat and laid it over the soldier.

He didn’t mention the Bible verses again. The chaplain got up and started to leave, but the soldier called him back. **“Look, Chaplain,”** he said, **“If there’s anything in that book of yours that makes a person help another person like you’ve helped me, then I want to hear it.”**

The chaplain might have quoted our passage from Matthew twenty-five: **“Whatever you do for the least of these, you do it to me. Whatever you fail to do for the least of these, you fail to do it for me.”**

We serve not only the people we know and like, but also the people we don’t know and might not like including the least and the lost.

A long, long time ago, our world was dark and full of sin. The people who lived in this darkness were without hope. They didn’t have a relationship with God because of their sins. Then, God did something new for them and for each one of us. God did for us what we were unable to do for ourselves. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into our world to take away our sins and to bring us new life and new hope. It was a gift.

In faith and in gratitude, we accept this gift by receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior and by doing our level best to do what he asks us to do . . . even if it’s hard.

It was Mother Teresa who put it this way, **“Every time I look into the face of someone dying of AIDS or hunger or poverty I see the face of Christ.”**

I believe that many of you see the face of Christ in the faces of others. I’ve seen many of you go the extra mile when it comes to helping the least and the lost. You have tried your best to match what you believe with how you live.

During these past few months,

- YOU, through this church, have collected food for the Bismarck Food Pantry.
- YOU have put together meals for families in need.
- YOU are making Christmas Shoe Boxes again this year for the children of the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation.
- YOU are involved in helping put together solar ovens for Haiti.
- Some of YOU have gone to Haiti to help them.
- YOU served the homeless by providing a Thursday evening meal for them and YOU did it twice this year.
- YOU had a Halloween Fun Night party which included many families from this neighborhood that do not belong to McCabe.
- YOU, through your offerings, send thousands of dollars each year to help support United Methodist missionaries and missions across the world.
- YOU, again through your generous donations, have provided scholarship money to college students.
- YOU do a lot for the least and the lost.

Yes, we could do better, but I’m proud of this church for not neglecting the poor and homeless, the least and the lost.

Thank you for putting your faith into action. We need to keep telling people and teaching people about seeing the face of Jesus in all the faces we meet. We need to keep telling people and teaching people that faith in Jesus Christ is both an affirmation we make and it's something we do. It's how we live our lives.

A pastor once said to his congregation, "**If you hope to be happy in heaven, why not be happy now? Following Jesus and serving him brings heaven to us today.**"

He was saying, "**helping the least and the lost today is the beginning of heaven on earth. The more we serve Christ, the better we will feel.**"

This continues to be my prayer for you. That you will keep serving the people God puts in our lives and the more we serve Christ, the better we will feel.