

Sermon  
Last Pentecost—Christ the King  
Saint Andrew's, Methuen  
November 22, 2020  
William Bradbury

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24  
Psalm 95:1-7a  
Ephesians 1:15-23  
Matthew 25:31-46

Today is the last Sunday of the Church Year, so it is fitting that we reflect on the last public teaching Jesus gives in Matthew's gospel before entering the great three days of the Easter Mystery.

The scene is the Throne Room in Heaven where the Son of Man, now King of the Universe, gathers the nations for judgment, which will reveal how well or poorly they lived their lives.

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**Let's begin by remembering what judgment is.**

Here's an example a friend uses that I often use: A young couple moves into their first apartment and are discussing the color of the living room walls: the husband says they are white. The wife says they are cream-colored. The argument escalates until the wife gets a sheet of white printer paper and slaps it in the middle of the wall—and there the truth is revealed: the walls are not white.

There is nothing the husband can say, because he can see the truth for himself. That's how judgment works—we will see it for ourselves and know it is the truth. Grey Temple, Jr

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As the nations stand there waiting for judgment there is only one interesting question: **what criteria will the King use**: what will the King hold up as the image of the perfect life that will show us how we have lived.

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Some standing there believe all they'll need to do is produce proof of church membership. They believe that when Jesus begins his ministry he says, "The time is fulfilled, Christianity is at hand" instead of what he actually says, "The Kingdom of God is at hand."

There are others who also feel rather good about themselves for they believe that the values most important to God are the same ones they hold. They have spent their lives valuing education, health, and a happy family.

They value a nice home and a nice car. They value succeeding at their work. Surely being successful will get them through the pearly gates just as it got them through this life.

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As the judgment begins, they are shocked into silence, for there is no mention of church membership, doing well in school, or success in business.

NO—there is only this: **Did they provide for the needs of the King when he was hungry and thirsty, a stranger and naked, sick and in prison?**

**That's it.**

**That's the test.**

**That's the only test.**

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But everyone says the same thing: "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty? And when was it that we saw you a stranger or naked? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison?"

They all think, "Lord if we'd ever seen YOU in need, we would have gladly stepped in to help! No question about it, but Lord we never ever saw YOU in such need."

But it turns out one group had unknowingly stepped in to help the King when they **helped fellow human beings in need.**

Those who paid attention to Jesus earlier in his ministry remember him saying, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

The final test will not be whether they, as the song says, **"did it my way" but whether they did it God's way—the Jesus way?**

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**Jesus himself is the icon of judgment.** His life is the embodiment of "God's Way": the will of the Creator: As you and I look at our lives next to his, we must realize with Saint Paul that we all fall short of the glory of God and none is worthy compared to Jesus. No one walks into the next life on his or her own merits.

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At the end of his teaching, Jesus makes it clear that how we live has eternal consequences. I take it to mean that when we ignore the needs of our fellow human beings and treat them like garbage, we turn into garbage ourselves--Garbage fit only for the smoking dump outside Jerusalem known as Gehenna, which is the image Jesus uses for living a life without God at our center and which is translated in most Bibles as our word "hell".

This is where the judged end up—not because God throws them there, but because every time they treat others as unworthy of good food, clean water, radical hospitality, and open-hearted compassion, they are choosing to live there.

**When we consistently turn our back on those in need, we are at the same time damaging and damning our own souls.**

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**Jesus shares this stark vision to wake us up from the nightmare of living for ourselves only. At the end of this horrific year—Jesus is calling us to move into the new year with an awakened consciousness that sees everyone and everything through the eyes of Christ.**

What Jesus is asking of us is this: **are we willing to let such a transformation happen keep happening to us every day? Are we open to it; do we pray for it?**

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In 1947 Mother Teresa had a vision that profoundly awakened her consciousness. In the first scene she sees the painful plight of the poor and the yet greater inner poverty that is hidden beneath their material poverty...they are reaching out to her. In the second scene she hears the Mother of Jesus say, *"Take care of them...they are mine...bring them to Jesus...carry them to Jesus...fear not...teach them to say the rosary...and all will be well...fear not...Jesus and I will be with you and your children."*

**That's how eternal life in this life begins—God changes our consciousness—changes the lens through which we see the world, and then we do the next thing Jesus tells us to do:**

Years later Mother Teresa put it this way:

**"I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that he will guide me to do whatever I'm supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I'm praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things."**