

*The day shall come for each of us.* A sermon preached on Christ the King Sunday, November 20, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: PSALM 23  
MATTHEW 25:31-46

What we know as the parable of the Last Judgement appalls us.

Not a scripture that few of us would revel to hear  
Some of us may be saying, if only we could tear it from the Bible

If only we could erase its words

Truly – maybe Jesus indeed was having a bad day when he wrote the words,

**When the Son of Man comes in his glory...he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (vs. 31-32)**

To read any of the gospels, but particularly Matthew, the warning of a final judgement when Jesus returns is a recurring theme.

This morning's reading Robin just read is a frightening and unsettling image – for the day shall come for each of us,  
When we shall be judged

And it will be infallible judgement.  
 As the parable details, we will not be judged  
 according to a rule book banked in heaven,  
 And then unlocked for a list of our sins.

No, no, no says the parable.  
 The Lord's judgement shall be based on our actions  
 AND our attitudes as we lived out each day.  
 Did we really, *I* mean really seek to cultivate a  
 relationship with Jesus, or did we just say we were  
 doing it to look good,  
 To impress ourselves and others with our piety  
 To fit into the Christian crowd

At judgement time,  
 All the masks and disguises will go – and we will  
 see ourselves as God has always seen us.  
 For remember, God is never fooled.

As a young man, Martin Luther was  
 terrified by the image of Jesus sitting in the sky and  
 deciding who is in and who is out  
 Can you blame him?

Call it poetry, or myth or nightmare or the  
 result of a difficult time in Jesus' own life, but this is  
 NOT an image that can be laughed away.

Yet, I don't think Jesus told the parable  
 then or we should hear it now as a vehicle the scare  
 the beejebers out of us!

For Jesus knew that constant fear and anxiety  
 would not sustain and allow us to cultivate a  
 healthy relationship with Him.

Even today,  
People cannot and will not be shouted into the  
Kingdom of God!

Let's be honest,  
Some within the wider community of faith or even  
this one simply cannot bend their mind around  
accepting that Jesus will return as a cloud borne Son  
of Man

Or even that he will sit on a throne to judge **'all the  
nations'**

So even consideration of this parable may seem  
irrelevant today.

However,  
As one reads the Gospels, considers the letters – be  
they of Paul or John,  
Thinks about Jesus' Old Testament roots,  
Listens to the experiences of believers long and  
recent past,  
What is crystal clear is that at some point,  
In some way, we – each of us/all of us – will be  
held accountable for our actions in this life.  
At some point, there will be no further chance to  
repent, no more opportunity to change.  
To say, "I really did not think this would happen"  
will be frankly academic.  
There is a real end, just as there was a real  
beginning.  
At the end, we shall find none other than Jesus  
Christ!

What specific teaching and reminders can be drawn from this morning's reading from Matthew? *The parable recalls to you and I that each of us are accountable.*

Accountability is something we often tug and chafe at.

It's my life

I'll live it the way I want

I me. Mine – watchwords of the world in which we live that sometimes creep or ooze into the community of faith, with disastrous results

As church leaders, power groups and 'influential people decide it's their way, or the highway.

What's best for them, is best for the church

General Motors in a time long ago and far away, once held that what was good for them as a corporation was good for America!

Look, like it or not, Jesus' words make it clear that each of us – believer or not – shall have to give account to the One who gave to each of us, our lives

The parable recalls to you and I that *judgement awaits everyone.*

There will be no exceptions,

No free passes

There will be no favoritism

There will be no excuses

It will be totally fair

No one will be given a chance to make a final plea  
 or say a final word  
 For at that point, the issue shall be settled.  
 Each person will be simply told to which group he  
 or she belongs.

**All the nations will be gathered before him, and  
 he will separate people one from another.**

Note, the choice is not between the obviously bad  
 and the obviously good  
 This is not a separation between predator and  
 victim  
 This is not a choice between those who oppose the  
 gospel and those who believe in it.

Jesus uses the simile **-as a shepherd separates  
 the sheep from the goats.**

Here in Matthew 25 Jesus is distinguishing  
 sharply among persons – all of whom profess to be  
 Christians and claim to belong to him as members  
 of the family of God.

The parable recalls to you and I *that there will  
 be great surprises among the people assembled on that  
 day.*

Lots of people who were very confident of their  
 piety, spiritual rightness, doctrinal purity will be  
 amazed that Jesus judges them as “A shepherd does  
 a goat..

Lots of people who thought themselves or were rated by others as lowly and not worthy will be astonished by the fact that Jesus extends the invitation:

**Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit  
the Kingdom prepared for you from the  
foundation of the world**

The parable recalls to you and me *what the basis of judgement rests upon.*

It is what the Christian faith has always rested upon, or been anchored in,

What is front and centre.

It has never been about Bible knowledge,

Or the rules of the church courts and governance

It is not even about which denominational structure one favours

**IT IS ABOUT JESUS**

It is about beginning, cultivating, sustaining a relationship with Jesus and out of that doing the stuff he expects us to do in terms of things like Mercy, love, grace, giving, sacrificial cares for others – particularly the poor and needy – and needy is not just financially needy, but emotionally and psychologically needy!

The ones to whom Jesus extends the invitation in the parable are the ones who do and did the ‘stuff of Jesus’ because they saw need!

They were not looking for reward or praise,  
 They were not even looking for Jesus in the face of  
 the other person or in the act itself.

They just did it – *because of the need they saw and the  
 love of God flowing in their hearts*

They are the ones who hear Jesus say, **Come, you  
 are blessed by my Father....**

The ones who do not receive the invitation  
 probably did the “stuff” Jesus expects us to do, but  
 their motives were more calculating.

Perhaps they kept mental or actual records and  
 expected praise.

Perhaps they were all too aware that they were  
 doing the unusual – Look at me Lord  
 Look what I am doing for the kingdom.

I wonder if such people will be the ones  
 standing before the Lord,  
 With totals of large sums of money given,  
 Complete with tax receipts.

I wonder if such people will be at a loss  
 because they have done all this stuff Jesus says we  
 are to do, expecting therefore Jesus’ acceptance.  
 But they have forgotten what Jesus says in the  
 Sermon on the Mount.

There, Jesus is very careful to tell us those deeds  
 done ‘to be seen by others’ already have their  
 reward.

**Let not your left hand know what your right hand  
 does,** Jesus says.

It is the times such people looked the other way when some needy person asked for help. The times they were busy with other demands, when word came of the sick and the dying. But such times have been forgotten. So they are quite honest when they say in astonishment, **Lord, when?..**

Perhaps nothing can describe this better — than a prayer that made the electronic round some years ago.

It was a prayer titled “A Prayer to Avoid, but it might well be called The Prayer of a Goat  
**O thou pleasant, comfortable, kindly, good-natured God: How glad I am that I can look forward, with a reasonable degree of certainty, to another ordinary day. Keep me today from anything that taxes my faith, from discomfort, from unnecessary strain, from unusual problems, especially those involving sickness or death, or the necessity of extending financial aid to relatives and friends.**

**Dear Lord, grant that nothing may occur which will disturb my satisfaction with the way I am, and the things I say, and the thoughts I think, the acts I do, or the many deeds I leave undone. Give me this day, in addition to my daily bread, the butter, meats, and sweetmeats that are my necessary diet, and let me not be troubled by qualms of conscience concerning the amount of time and money I spend on food and clothing, pastimes, good and bad, and those pursuits which, while not of spiritual value, are the accepted hallmark of the normal citizen of this**

enlightened community in this enlightened age.

About the future and the darkening trend of things, keep me from thoughtfulness. Events rush on, the world travails. Can screaming headlines prove thy hand's at work this very moment, bringing near that fateful cry, 'Behold! He comes!?' O, Lord, such disconcerting thoughts! Keep me from worrying about such things, and guide me safely to and from my office, and my home. Amen."

Ouch!

So how can we have a better chance at receiving Jesus' invitation, rather than his casting off?

First, *don't panic*.

This may be the first time you have noticed this parable, first time you have heard it read  
This may be the first time in a long time that you have even thought about this parable.

When I worked between degrees at doing inventory at a structural steel plant,  
My boss used to say to me, 'whatever you do Herb, don't panic!

He was concerned that I not be careless, hasty or take unnecessary chances moving around pieces of structural steel stored in the work yard

For steel plate, rebar and angles are unforgiving to toes, fingers and exposed soft tissue.

"Whatever you do, don't panic!" I think is sound counsel as well for living out the Christian life.

Consider every teaching of scripture to avoid knee jerk and panicky behavior,  
For behavior driven by guilt, fear or anxiety is not sustainable.

Be measured, Make time to consider decisions.

Think

Remember Jesus holds in his hands the torn pieces of each of our lives

Remember that he hears our cries and prayers – he does forgive those who are truly contrite and repentant.

Secondly, remember it is *never too late to change behavior and attitude.*

This side of heaven, sustaining change with the help of the Holy Spirit is possible for even the most irascible soul and the most hardened heart.

I for one am tremendously encouraged and hopeful about this truth – *it is never too late to change*

Third, remember, *it is all about Jesus* – this Christian life we live. A controlling question remains -- Are we living our lives for him?