

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours this day, the Last Sunday in the Church year. The title for today’s sermon is “Calling all nations!” and is from the Gospel of St. Matthew, chapter 25. Let us pray... Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, Oh Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday of the Church year. Fittingly, today’s Gospel also marks the end of Jesus’ formal teaching in Matthew’s Gospel. At this time of year we look forward to the blessed day when Christ returns in glory.

Jesus describes the magnificent picture of what will happen when He returns. Jesus tells us how all the nations will be called and gathered together before His throne. Just take a second to think about what that will look like. All people, from every tribe, every race, from every country and from the time of Adam and Eve to every person who ever lived and ever will live, all will all be present and gathered there before Jesus. It’s not going to be a small crowd! In addition to all people being present, all the angels and the host of heaven will also be present. What a blessed and joyous time it is going to be, at least for us who are the sheep of His pasture. I wouldn’t want to be one of the goats.

Now, let’s take a moment and look at what Jesus says about His sheep, about how they do all the things right here in His list. We go to those in prison, cloth the naked, welcome strangers, feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, and visit the sick. We all do those things, don’t we? (*Pause*)

So, when was the last time you went to a prison to visit someone, to see someone you didn’t know? No wait, let’s skip that one because it’s a hard one, and dangerous, and who here would really go to a prison, they are too far out of the way and you know what kind of people are in them.

Instead, let’s look at an easier one; when was the last time you helped someone who is naked by clothing him or her? No sorry, again, this is Canada. Nobody is naked in Canada, they’d freeze to death, mainly at this time of year. Anyways if someone really was naked or needy there are other people and organizations who are trained to deal with them and usually they end up with the first group mentioned. Anyways we can’t take that one literally can we?

Well here’s one—strangers—I know everyone here welcomes strangers, on the street, at the post office, and into your car or home, right? Anyone? Ahh, again, in this part of the world people just don’t do that kind of thing, at least not the last two. It’s not safe. Something bad could happen.

So how are you doing so far to be on God’s preferred list? 0 for 3. How about the other 3? Do you, do we, feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, or visit the sick who are not relatives or close friends. Where do you fall in your regular routine? Most days I am

somewhere around 0 for 6. Where does that put me and where does that put you? Have you ever gone 6 for 6 on this list, or for that matter 10 for 10 in regards to the Commandments, even for a single day? I know I haven't come close. So on the day when Christ does return and calls all nations before Him in Judgment, where do you stand: His right or His left? With the sheep, or with the goats?

Now, Jesus clearly talks about the real existence of hell in our Gospel reading today. Hell is “**the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**” by God, but it was never intended for people. Hell was created for the devil and his angels who rebelled against God. Yet because of mankind's fall in to sin and our rebellion, Hell became a possible eternal destination for people because of their own choice and rejection of God. Still, Hell is, as described by Scripture, something worse than anything you or I can imagine.

So, how do you and your actions measure up? Do you feel that though you really try, you just can't seem to do enough? I know I do. Do ever feel like you will be placed with the goats who on Judgment Day, and lead away to the eternal BBQ with you as the main course? Now if your salvation or mine was based in any way on our works, the answer would be yes and death and the return of Christ would be a very scary thought. But Paul reminds us in His letters how we “**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**”(Rom 3:23-4)

Your works do not save you, rather it is “**by grace that you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**” (Eph 2:8-9) You are going to a feast, but you will not be the main course.

The reason is God found you, made you His own through the waters of Holy Baptism, and there the Holy Spirit worked faith and salvation in Your heart, completely separate from your works. Since Christ has already taken all your sins and nailed them to His cross in His body, He has done everything necessary for your salvation. There is nothing left for you to do for your salvation. Here's why the Son of man can say “**Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.**”(Matthew 25:34) Through Holy Baptism, God blessed you and He made you His Own sheep with Christ as your shepherd. Christ did it all for you, and thanks be God for that. Because Christ gave His life for you, how through His suffering, His death on the cross, His 3 days in the grave, His resurrection, and His ascension for you and in your place, you are blessed and delivered from the damnation you deserve. Instead God marked you as His sheep, marked you with God's name, and invited you to the eternal wedding feast.

Because of Christ's work for you, you are invited to share in His inheritance of eternal life, away from the eternal punishment of hell. The Holy Spirit works to create and sustain faith in you through the regular hearing of God's Word and receiving of His Sacrament. In this faith you are able to look with joyful anticipation to the return of Christ in all His glory. The

difference between you and those who are condemned to eternal punishment is your God given faith and trust in Him. The difference between the sheep and the goats is the sheep trust and believe solely in the Christ Jesus and His completed work for their salvation while the goats do not. In the end, the goats will recognize Jesus as Lord, but it will be too late.

This parable is reminiscent of Jesus' comment earlier in Matthew's Gospel when He said **"Not everyone who says to me "Lord Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"** (Matt 7:21-23) The focus of today's Gospel is Christ, not us. It is not our mighty works and it is not our miraculous deeds which make us sheep and acceptable to God, it is Christ!

God-given faith and trust in Christ and His salvation makes us His sheep. Baptism brings us into the fold and regularly hearing His Word and receiving His Sacrament keeps us there. It's not the great things we do, it is the great things the Holy Spirit does which makes us acceptable and pleasing to God.

As God's sheep, the Holy Spirit works through us in what we say, in what we do, and in how we act. We don't have to do the sensational or spectacular. The things Jesus said we do just about any Christian can do, because they just come naturally by the working of the Holy Spirit through us. Our actions are good and pleasing to God because they are done in faith. These actions are for our neighbours, to comfort them in sickness, both spiritual and physical, and to visit those in the jail of their own unbelief and condemnation as much as those in a physical prison. Still, it is only through God given faith that we, and all Christians, will be called by God and taken with the other sheep into the wedding feast on Judgment Day. For us, Judgment Day begins the wonderful and eternal wedding feast with Christ as the groom and the whole Christian Church as the bride. For the goats, Judgment Day will be the beginning of a great Divorce.

For us, along with the whole communion of saints, it will be great. At Christ's return we will share in the eternal wedding feast and not as passive observers. We are part of the Holy Christian Church, the bride of Christ. You will be able to enjoy the entire feast which has been prepared. Soon, here today, we will get a little taste of the feast to come in the Lord's Supper. As we stand before the altar, we gather with all Christians, the whole communion of saints on earth and in heaven, as we are invited by Christ Himself to feast on His own Body and Blood, in, with, and under the forms of bread and wine present right there on the altar for the forgiveness of all your sins. The Lord's Supper is the medicine of immortality because in it you receive forgiveness, and with forgiveness, eternal life. Yet the eternal feast in heaven, the one which we have the invitation for, will be far, far better than anything you or I could ever dream of. There

we will be in the presence of God, in a place so exquisitely beautiful and peaceful it cannot be fully described.

Now Christ will not only be calling all nations to Himself on the Last Day. He also calls all nations to Himself here to His Word and Sacrament today and every day until He returns.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel Christ told His disciples to "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**" (Matt 28:19-20) As God's people in Christ, as part of the Church, you have the blessed opportunity to share God's Good News and God's invitation for all people to come to Him. You, along with all Christians, can share this good news by sending missionaries, like the ones Lutheran Church Canada sends to Nicaragua, Ukraine, Thailand, Cambodia, Haiti, and the list goes on. There is also a huge need for missionaries here in Canada. You have the privilege and call to share the Gospel with your families, friends, neighbours, and strangers here at home. The Gospel and Christ's saving grace is not just for proclaiming to those abroad, there are many here, within a rock throw of the Trinity who may never have heard the Good News. God does not want any to be lost; for God "**desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**" (1 Tim 2:4) What a blessing and opportunity you and I have to share this truth so on the Last Day, when God calls you and when He calls me, He may also call all nations and all people to join in the eternal feast.

Amen.

\* This sermon belongs to Christ and His Church because it is taken from His Word. Please feel free to copy or use it accordingly. I expect people to copy my sermons otherwise I would not post them. I only ask that you quote accurately if you attribute anything to me. Should you decide to contact me, I would be very interested in knowing where you are. Please include the name of your city, province or state, and country when contacting me.