

2nd Sunday in End Times – Last Judgment – Year A – November 6, 2011 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Based on Matthew 25:31-46 written by Pastor Paul Horn

“Come! Take the inheritance prepared for you!”

You only have 442 days left. You’d better get your house in order, try to check off the items you had on your bucket list, make your peace with those you’ve been at odds with... because you know, the ancient Mayan calendar is going to run out in 442 days and then you had better watch out. December 21, 2012 is going to cause all sorts of worldwide catastrophes.

It’s amazing what people get all worked up over - half-truths and speculation. The facts are these: the calendar the Mayans created was meant to come to the end of its cycle and roll over into the next cycle. Like our Western society, every year December 31st is followed, not by the End of the World, but by January 1st. So the Mayan calendar, when it runs out on December 21st, 2012, will be followed by three more days of shopping before Christmas. (Dr. Karl “Great Moments in Science”)

There are so many different ideas about the end of the world. Sadly, most if not all fail to focus on the essential part of the last day: not the how or when, but where will you go to spend eternity after that day? What will you say to your Creator when he stands on the earth to judge all nations? Or better yet, what will he say to you? Wouldn’t it be nice to know? This morning, Jesus gives us the straight truth through his gospel writer Matthew, chapter 25.

The conversation begins in chapter 24, when Jesus’ disciples had asked their Teacher when the end of time would come. Jesus gave them signs that would accompany the end times. Based on those signs we know that since the time of the Apostles, we have been living in the End Times. These signs are a constant reminder that Jesus is coming soon. In chapter 25 Jesus used two parables to teach his disciples that no one knows the day or hour when he will come again, so he tells us to be ready.

Then, in our lesson today he tells us exactly what will happen when he does come. Jesus will appear in the sky for all nations to see; no longer as a humble baby, but as the glorious King, accompanied by his armies of angels. The King will sit on his throne in glory and majesty. The dead will be raised. The King’s winged messengers will go out and gather all people who have ever lived. They will be brought before the King. He will separate all of the people, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats in his flocks. The Shepherd King will make his sheep stand on his right and the goats on the left.

The King will pronounce his judgment on his sheep. But when you read it, it sounds more like a comforting invitation, **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”** (vs34-36)

Both the sheep and the goats fail to see how their earthly lives could possibly merit their eternal fate. In fact, they speak the same words, “When did we see you this way?” As Lutherans this is puzzling to us, because we continue to maintain, according to Scripture, that an individual is saved not by their works or efforts, but by faith in Christ alone. We believe that those who go to hell do so because of their unbelief. But whenever Jesus talks about judgment, it’s almost always on the basis of works. “Those who have done good will go to heaven; those who have done evil will go to eternal perdition.” How do we reconcile the two?

The sheep had faith in Christ. And faith gives evidence of itself through the way we speak, act and think toward others in this world – giving food to the hungry, visiting those who are sick and in prison and so forth. A Christian with faith in Christ cannot help but do good works, because he or she is responding out of thanksgiving to Christ’s love for them. And so, the King’s eternal judgment is based on the heart, which is from where those actions flowed - a heart that trusted not in good works for salvation but in Christ.

The goats on the other hand, neither had faith nor true fruits of faith. The Bible tells us, **“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”** (Hebrews 11.6) This teaching is difficult to grasp because there are many people who live good moral lives. They are generous givers to charities. They are kind hearted people. In the eyes of the world they have proven themselves worthy. Take Steve Jobs, for example. Most people would say that he did much good in his life. A member emailed me several cartoons that were sketched for the newspapers after his death. All of those cartoons depict Mr. Jobs in heaven. However, according to the speeches he delivered and articles he wrote, he had Buddhist leanings. Buddhism believes that Jesus was not God. Salvation is gained by eliminating all desires or cravings. In other words, by your own efforts you will enter paradise.

The people of this world who have done great humanitarian acts will stand before the King. The King will say to many of them, **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** (vs41) Their works did not flow from a heart of faith in Christ. They did not believe in Jesus but themselves and their good works. They will be given an eternal judgment, just as the sheep, but theirs will be for eternal punishment – a place that was never intended for human beings, but for the devil and his angels. But in their unbelief they rejected the King and he will have no choice but to cast them from his presence.

It would be easy to turn the sermon theme into, “Don’t be goats; be sheep!” But we know that we are the sheep in Jesus’ parable. Baptized into Christ, the Shepherd has given us the gift of faith. Faith apprehends the gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins. But the other truth is that because of our lingering sinful nature, we have a tendency to behave like goats.

Did you know that a goat herd is very hierarchical? Every goat has its place in the herd. The goats show their dominance over others by head-butting and pushing the other goats. As sheep do we sometimes have this tendency? We do our good works - supporting military families, visiting sick members in their homes and hospital, giving food and clothing to the needy, calling on inactive members, serving on committees and boards. But a little piece of me wants to be recognized for that work, because I look at some of the other sheep and wonder why some of them aren’t doing those things. There’s a part of my ego that needs to be stroked and acknowledged, “Yes, that’s a good little sheep. Here’s a cookie.”

Did you also know that baby goats are very good at hiding themselves? They often lose themselves from the rest of the herd by crawling into tiny holes and caves. Don’t we also hide ourselves away from the rest of the herd - when we forget to show love toward others in the herd? We often know what we are to do, but we become lazy sheep and poor stewards of our time. There is no sense of urgency or priority for other sheep and we do not do it.

This is proof that salvation is not by our works, for even as sheep of the Good Shepherd we somehow manage to slip sin in with our best works. On the Last Day we may remember the unholy things we had done in our lifetimes and the good we left undone. And that is why we will be astonished when we stand before the King. He will not enumerate our sins, but defend us and welcome us into his kingdom.

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” (vs34) Before you had a chance to do any good or any evil, the Father planned this all

out. He knew that mankind would bring the curse of sin on himself. He knew that he that he would have to provide a Savior for them. So he planned to send his own Son. His Son would take the curse on himself.

The Lamb of God became the scapegoat. He did not deserve it. He had lived a life of perfect obedience. He fed the hungry, visited the sick, raised the dead, was a friend to strangers, freed those in prison, and did it all with a servant's heart, with a heart full of love toward all people. Innocent was he, but allowed the curse of your sins, death, to come on him. By the Lamb's vicarious sacrifice, his blood has cleansed you and covered over the times we have foolishly acted like goats. On the Last Day, he will not point that fact out, for at the baptismal font and here at the altar God applied the blood of Christ to you. You are sheep that have been washed and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

And because of that sacrifice he says, "**Come! Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you!**" For you... and for me. How comforting those words are! You have in your possession something of considerable value, which you did not earn nor deserve - an eternal inheritance that God prepared for you, earned for you, has given to you, freely, through faith in his Son, the King, the Judge, the Lamb who loves you!

Isn't this comforting, that the King has given us a preview of the final Judgment, which really won't be a judgment for us, but more of a comforting invitation! While we wait for the final trumpet call of the archangel, we live among this herd of sheep. Look around, you will see sheep in need – spiritual care, lacking their necessary daily bread, emotionally bruised sheep. One of the ways we will not neglect those sheep is by praying for them. You remember the new stewardship calendar? This week we will pray for deKalands, Poore, Elliott, Emerson, Enevold, Hale and Harris families. When we keep them before the throne of our King with our prayers, then we will keep them in our hearts. Our hearts are the hearts of sheep, filled with love from the Shepherd. These are hearts who will not only pray but also reach out to the other sheep in the sheep pen. These hearts of yours will see the face of your King in their faces. You will joyfully serve them as if you were serving your King, who is coming soon. To whom we pray, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Bring us your heavenly kingdom, which you have so graciously prepared for us! Amen!"

Information for goat herding taken from <http://fiascofarm.com/goats/behavior.htm>