

## *Matthew 25:31-46, February 12, 2011*

<sup>31</sup>When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' <sup>41</sup>Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' <sup>44</sup>Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

## *Matthew 25:31 -46, 2014*

When you read this passage carefully you discover there is something that both the righteous and the unrighteous, the sheep and the goats, have in common.

They had never made the connection between the Son of Man, the king, and those described as

“one of the least of these who are members of my family...”

What I take from this is that these people, some of whom have acted like Jesus followers and some who haven't, may not have acted out of faith in Jesus. They may or may not even know who Jesus is.

One way or the other, no connection has been made between caring for the poor and needy and a life of faith in Jesus.

This lesson is kind of tricky because of one Greek word translated “nations” in verse 32.

“All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Who are the nations,  
the goats and sheep who are separated and, in the end, either sent into eternal punishment or eternal life?

What we don't grasp about the Greek word translated as nations is that it means those who are unbelievers, Gentiles, pagans.

It is these people who the Son of Man will come to separate according to how they have treated the hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the naked, sick, and the prisoner.

Why would Jesus be concerned about telling his disciples about these people?

First off, among the Jewish and Christian writings about the end times two or more judgments are frequently spoken of; one for Jews and Christians, another for Gentiles & non-believers.

But secondly and more importantly, ask this question, “Is there anything particularly Christian about feeding the hungry, giving a drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick or visiting the prisoner?”

Do you have to be a Christian to do these things? Or can anyone do them?

As you take a look around the community, at your neighbors and friends, at the social service organizations in your community who do so many good things, are they all Christian? Are they all motivated by Christian beliefs?

Does the United Way have any particular Christian Values that guides their work?

\$1.5 million dollars distributed through 35 agencies in Volusia and Flagler counties alone.

Some of those agencies certainly are faith centered, and some Christian.

We support many organizations through our Change for Change collections. We don't necessarily screen them for the Christian values they hold, so long as they are not contrary to Christian beliefs, but we screen by the good they do, the lives they change.

We live in communities where good things are done by people who don't know Jesus, or are motivated by things other than faith.

Jesus, in the 4 parables previous to this lesson was at least talking about the kingdom of heaven,

but He does not use the same language in this lesson.

The kingdom these sheep and goats are a part of is the kingdom of this day when they care for hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the naked, sick, and the prisoner, or not

These people, by means of their service, are unwittingly joined to Jesus.

They become unknowing followers by their service.

Perhaps not baptized, perhaps not part of the church,  
perhaps not worshipping regularly if at all,  
but Jesus claims the work that they do as His work;  
His work done by them.

This is about being a follower of Jesus, a disciple of Jesus, intended or not.

This raises an interesting point.

Can't we be in conversation or partnership with the non-believer in the work done for the needy?

If Jesus expects this from non-believers, how much more does he expect from those who believe, who have been baptized, who believe they have been saved by his suffering and dying, and resurrection;  
those claiming to be Jesus followers?

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew we hear lessons about ways of living that characterize the Christian life.

Today our lesson points out that sins of omission are every bit as important as the others.

The things you don't do will define not only your life, but the lives of those who either don't know Jesus or believe in him, or both.

In the end will Jesus be able to say to you,  
"When you gave to the least of these you gave also to me?"

These are lessons that need to be learned early in life so they become part of the character of our children.

Kellie Lehr understands that and taught it to our elementary age children for years, and now our middle school youth.

Liz and Glen LaFond as youth leaders here for so many years got that and

that is why they took our youth on a mission trips and did service projects.

That would be part of the work of our new Director of Youth and Family Faith Formation.

We have great kids here.

They know who Jesus is, and continue to learn and grow in knowledge and faith.

But, not everyone has made that connection between Christ our King and helping the needy, even though they continue to do His work in our community and the world.

They are Jesus followers, just like you and I are called to be. They just don't know it yet.

Are they ever in for a surprise when the king says to them;

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Amen