

Sermon followed by Service

November 26, 2023

Matthew 25:31-

What Do Saints Do?

“She’s such a saint! Always a smile and a good word.” “My mom’s such a saint! No matter what we do she still loves us.” “He must be a saint! He’s so good with the kids.” Saints. You’ve seen them; I’ve seen them. We have them right here. In fact, you are them. You are the saints of God. **So What Do Saints Do?**

Our lesson is a picture of Judgment Day. As we heard the last few weeks, Jesus is judging. You heard what Jesus said to those who couldn’t be bothered to share his heart: **“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”** Sounds like what he said to those who couldn’t be bothered to be ready for him: **“I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.”** That gets our attention, doesn’t it? On Judgment Day, we won’t all get a participation trophy with a ticket into heaven. Makes what we’re about to hear all the more amazing. Jesus is judging. First the sheep. What’s his judgment? It’s an invitation – **“The King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”**

“Take your inheritance.” I have a gas lamp I inherited from my dad’s mom, and a nice piece of marble-topped furniture I inherited from my mom’s mom. They mean a lot to me; they might even be worth some money. But compared to the inheritance our Father has for us - a lamp with a cracked shade and a marble top waiting to be cracked are nothing. And what does the Father have for us? Everything he has; everything on earth; all of heaven - he has for you, his saints.

In our lesson from Revelation, Jesus told us what that means for the saints – **“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** Sounds good, doesn’t it?

Now a question for you – what’s your favorite picture of heaven? Heaven as beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband, showing off the joy of her love? Or heaven as glorious as a city made of gems and jewels and paved with gold? Or heaven as full of life as a tree planted in a river, always bearing fruit, a fresh, new crop every month, green and full of life? Whatever your favorite picture of heaven, you and the rest of God’s saints around us, you and the saints who have gone before us, you and the saints coming after us - we will share that life together!

And what will that life be like? Here and now we see so many of God’s people, God’s saints, hurting, sick, dying, going without. But in heaven? The saints you see hurting - no more hurt; together we will share perfect peace. The saints you see in so much need, always having to do without - no more need; together we will share God’s riches, perfectly cared for. The saints you see sick or dying or already gone - no more death; together we will share a perfect life, a life that will never sour or go bad. That’s what your Father has for you!

Why? Because Jesus sees you as his perfect saints. Jesus said: **“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, 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.”** And then he explained: **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”**

How can that be? Are we saintly enough to be saints because of the way we take care of the least among us? Think of the least - the lowest, the neediest, the most (I think we’re called) socially challenged; the most easily hurt; the most easily offended, the most easily offensive. How well do we meet their needs? When we think of caring for them, do we ever think of excuses? Do we ever want to point the blame finger back at them? Do we ever want to dump the load back on those least able, or someone, anyone else? Those who need love from us - how well do we meet their needs?

I’ll say it again - Are we saintly enough to be saints because of the way we take care of the least among us? Remember, the standard of sainthood, what it takes to be a saint fit for heaven is nothing less than a life as saintly as Jesus.

That's not me; and that's not you either, is it? Time and again we act more like the goats in the 2nd part of our lesson - not meeting the needs of Jesus' brothers and sisters, and not fit for life with Jesus.

So how can Jesus see us as his perfect saints? Baptism. In your baptism - the Jesus who died on the cross to pay for your sin - in baptism he washed you clean of your sin. In your baptism - the Jesus who lived the life of a saint every day, in every way - in baptism he covered you with his saintly life. The way he befriended the lonely and the untouchable is on your account, just as if you did it. The way he cared for the hurting and forgave the sinner is on your account, just as if you did it. Yes, the way Jesus took care of people is on your account, just as if you did it. That's how Jesus sees you and counts you his saints.

So now that we're saints, what do saints do? Jesus tells us: "**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, 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.**"

What do saints do? Saints care for and meet the needs of God's people. Some of you give to our church food pantry. Some of you are giving to our Share the Burden Fund or our synod's Committee on Relief. Some of you visit our homebound or send them cards - oh, they love that. And they wish there were more people visiting them. Some of you visit our sick in the hospital or cook up that favorite hot dish for the family at home. Some of you send cards or letters to our brothers and sisters in prison.

Why? Saints meet the needs of God's people. And what kind of people did Jesus talk about? He said: "**the least of these brothers of mine**" - that guest nobody is talking to, the new member who isn't sure where she fits in - the life-long member who is too shy to speak up and fit in - that classmate sitting alone at the lunch table - that new couple sitting alone at the Bible Class table - until you stepped in.

You might feel awkward; we might feel like we have both our feet in our mouths. But someday what will Jesus say? "**Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the**

creation of the world. For I was lonely and instead of you talking with your friends, you talked to me; I was new in town and instead of you just saying “hi,” you invited me over for supper; I didn’t belong, I wasn’t a joiner, but instead of you waiting for me to join, you made me belong; I was all messed up, and you helped me with a smile; I messed up, and you still loved me.”

Why? That’s what saints do. Not just when we have extra time. Not just when it’s convenient. Not just when “they” make the first step. And not just when they are “our kind of people.” But as saints we make the time, and as saints we make the 1st move, and as saints we reach out to “those kind of people” as our dearest equals. Why? As saints we do what needs to be done to show Jesus’ love.

Why? For Jesus. Jesus said it: **“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”** When you befriend that guest, that new neighbor or new member, that old neighbor or old member who is always alone - Jesus says, “Thank you for being my friend.” When you talk with that someone who needs a talk, when you help that family who needs a hand, Jesus says, “Thank you for caring about me.” When we step up and step in as Jesus’ loving, caring saints - Jesus says, “Thank you.” And he says something more; someday, he will say: **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”** Amen.

November 25 & 26, 2023

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by more and more people expecting anarchy, doomsday, the end of the world as we know it. So what do they do? They store up food and supplies, and build and bury doomsday bunkers so they can save (whom do you think?).

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... Jesus takes us to the end of time and shows us the life he approves and rewards in these end times.

OPENING HYMN

“Crown Him with Many Crowns”

Hymn 511

Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne;
hark how the heav’nly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King thro’ all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of love— behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified.
No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his wond’ring eye at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o’er the grave
and rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save.
His glories now we sing who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of heav’n, enthroned in worlds above;
crown him the King to whom is giv’n the wondrous name of Love.
Crown him with many crowns as thrones before him fall;
crown him, ye kings, with many crowns for he is King of all.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION

M: Dear friends, let us approach God with a true heart and confess our sins, asking him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

C: **Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin.**
For faithless worrying and selfish pride,
For sins of habit and sins of choice,
For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do,
I deserve to be cast away from your presence forever.
O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake.

ABSOLUTION

M: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. In his great mercy, God made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our sins. Hear the word of Christ through his called servant: I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY (*Kyrie*)

M: In peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the well-being of all people everywhere, that they may receive from you all they need to sustain body and life, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the spread of your life-giving gospel throughout the world, that all who are lost in sin may be brought to faith in you, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For patience and perseverance in this life, that we may not lose the hope of heaven as we await your return, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Lord of life, live in us that we may live for you.

C: **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Eternal God, merciful Father, you have appointed your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of his return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for your own from the foundation of the world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Daniel 7:9-10,13-14

“As I looked,

“thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.

His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.

A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.

Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated,
and the books were opened.

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Refrain

Let us shout for joy to the rock of our sal - va - tion.

Tone

Come, let us sing for joy / to the LORD;
 let us shout aloud to the rock of our sal- / vation.
 Let us come before him with thanks- / giving
 and extol him with mu- / sic and song.
 For the LORD is the / great God,
 the great King a- / bove all gods.
 In his hand are the depths / of the earth,
 and the mountain peaks be- / long to him.
 The sea is his, for he / made it,
 and his hands formed the / dry land. *Refrain*

Come, let us bow down in / worship,
 let us kneel before the LORD our / maker;
 for he is our God and we are the people of his / pasture,
 the flock under / his care.
 Today, if only you would / hear his voice,
 "Do not hard- / en your hearts
 as you did at / Meribah,
 as you did that day at Massah in the / wilderness."
Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

SECOND READING

Revelation 7:9–17

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne
will shelter them with his presence.

‘Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.

The sun will not beat down on them,
nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;
'he will lead them to springs of living water.'
'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

A SAINTS TRIUMPHANT CONFESSION OF FAITH:

A READING OF PROMISES FULFILLED

M: I am resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live,
even though he dies;

C: And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. (*John 11:25-26*)
Roland Maki June 9, 2023

M: My flesh and my heart may fail,

C: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (*Psalms 73:26*)
Tomm Grossmann June 10, 2023

M: For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.
If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.

C: So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (*Romans 14:7-8*)
John Garwal September 8, 2023

M: Thanks be to God.

C: He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SECOND ARTICLE EXPLANATION (REDEMPTION)

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity,
and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won
me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with
gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent
suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.
This is most certainly true.

HYMN

“Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See”

Hymn 884

Lord, when your glory I shall see and taste your kingdom’s pleasure,
your blood my royal robe shall be, my joy beyond all measure!
When I appear before your throne, your righteousness shall be my crown;
with these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought,
as your own bride I shall be brought, to stand in joy beside you.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Matthew 25:31–46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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, 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.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“See, He Comes, the King of Glory”

Hymn 494

See, he comes, the King of glory, angels blazing round his throne,
wielding wrath to those who spurned him, bearing blessings for his own.
Do not dread that day, dear Christian! Do not fear his fearsome face,
for the judge is our dear Savior; we are guarded by his grace.

See, he comes, the King of glory, naming deeds we did for him:
feeding, clothing, sharing, caring, visiting, inviting in.
We may ask, “When did we do this— show you, Lord, such courtesy?”
He will say, “The least, the lowly— serving them was serving me.”

See, he comes the King of glory, with a kingdom to award.
We have not deserved or earned it; it’s his gift, not our reward.
All our works are but an off’ring of our gratitude and praise.
We serve not so God will save us; we serve God because we’re saved.

Till he comes, the King of glory, angels blazing round his throne,
we will turn our eyes to heaven, tune our ears to trumpet's tone.
But we won't neglect our neighbors needing comfort, shelter, love.
Kindnesses for friends and strangers serve our Savior-King above.

SERMON

HYMN

"Lord, You Call Us as Your People"

Hymn 736

Lord, you call us as your people, out of darkness into light.
You created and redeemed us, made us precious in your sight.
Give us faith to trust you boldly and to love you steadfastly.
By your Spirit may we ever faithful to our callings be.

Lord, you call us as disciples, walking on your pilgrim way.
Crucified and risen Savior, you are with us ev'ry day.
Give us wisdom, give us courage as you teach us patiently.
By your Spirit may we ever faithful to our callings be.

Lord, you send us to the harvest in your Great Commission's call,
reaching out to all the nations, bringing life and hope to all.
Give us boldness and compassion, bless us with your eyes to see.
By your Spirit may we ever faithful to our callings be.

Lord, you call us to new ventures by a pathway yet unknown.
Though we cannot see the ending, we will follow you alone.
Knowing that your hand is guiding and you love us faithfully,
by your Spirit may we ever faithful to our callings be.

Lord, you call us as your people, now in faith we sing your praise:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, alleluias to you raise.
Hold us in your gracious power, blessèd Holy Trinity,
that rejoicing we will ever faithful to our callings be.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Brief intercessory prayers may be added in a fitting place.

Eternal and gracious Father, today we end another year of grace. Once again the Holy Spirit has nourished and strengthened our faith as we reviewed the words and works of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. We have rejoiced to hear that you kept the promises you made to your ancient people. We were encouraged as we remembered how you empowered your followers to proclaim the good news in their world.

Work in us every day to believe the truths of your Word and apply them in our lives.

We are aware that we live in dangerous times as Satan and his forces of evil assault your people again and again. Give us wisdom to discern teachings that subtly deny the Scriptures. Provide courage to stand against the attacks of godless opponents. Strengthen our resolve to confess the truth and then to speak the truth in love.

Work in us every day to be watchful and cautious as we live in our world.

Help us take to heart that your Son, our Lord Jesus, is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Since the day of his return is unknown to us, lead us to note the signs that signal the end of time. Spare us from fear as trouble and woe increase, and fill us with hope as we long for that great day.

Work in us every day to be ready for the moment of his coming.

Fill us with concern for family members and friends who are not taking seriously their need for Jesus and his forgiveness. Provide opportunities to reach out to them with patient persistence and to lovingly lead them to your Word and sacraments. Make us generous with our offerings so that others can go in our place to proclaim the good news.

Work in us every day to witness to Christ and his love for sinners.

Lead us to see our Savior's face in the faces of the poor and hungry, the lonely and forgotten, the oppressed and imprisoned, and move to support them whenever we can. [Today we ask that you keep in your care... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Empower our faith to be lights in the world so that people may see our good works and glorify you and your Son.

Work in us every day to imitate your love for the lost, the least, and the last.

If you call us to glory before the final day comes, carry our souls to heaven where we will await the resurrection of our bodies. Comfort those who may grieve over losing us and point them to the day when they will join us at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Work in us every day so that we are ready whenever you call us home.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Fill us with hope and joy as we await your Son's return. Cause us to enjoy your earthly blessings in light of your eternal glories and to realize that heaven is really our home. Lead us to long for the splendor of Paradise where you will wipe away all tears from our eyes.

**Work in us every day as we listen for the sound of the final trumpet.
Amen.**

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“Rejoice, the Lord Is King”

Hymn 524

Rejoice, the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

The Lord, our Savior, reigns, the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains, he took his seat above:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

His kingdom cannot fail, he rules o’er earth and heav’n;
the keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv’n:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and judge shall come
and take his servants up to their eternal home:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

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