

Prepared      Matthew 25:31-46      Pentecost 24 last Sunday of year      Nov. 22, 2020

After the separation, before the description - Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Matthew 25 prepared

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today is the last Sunday of the church year, a time to focus on Christ's return to culminate his kingdom of Glory. Now God's kingdom is both here and coming. We pray your kingdom comes, and it does. It is already here when we see the reign of God in his kingdom of power, where he rules the world he created and sustained. This is one reason we pray, when we pray to the one who has 'the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever'. The 'forever and ever' includes now. God has the power now, so he can respond to prayer. And we call this the kingdom of power. And God does more, After we learn God the father almighty made heaven and earth, we learn of Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who died and rose that we may be forgiven. God forgives sins through His son in Christ's body, the church. And as we pray forgive us our trespasses, we recognize this kingdom of Grace. And yet we also pray that the power and the grace may be revealed fully, that we may grasp by sight what we hold onto now by faith. We pray for Christ's return, for the kingdom of Glory, when we pray, 'Thy kingdom come'.

And today we speak of when the son returns, with his angels in glory, and the sons of God are revealed fully. We speak of them inheriting a kingdom, the one spoken of in revelation, where the Lord, the king, is in the midst of the city, with no sun or moon, for the Lord himself is her light. In that light the people are revealed.

And do note I said revealed, not judged. The sheep are separated from the goats, because goats and sheep are different. There are 4-H programs about judging livestock, but there are none to tell a sheep from a goat. They don't need that program, because sheep and goats are different. Promises and curses are spoken, but they are just a recognition of where people stand in relation to God and the kingdom.

The king speaks, 'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' WE often look at this passage as a list of things to do so we will be judged well. But the king isn't giving a rubric to judge by, a checklist to complete. HE is describing the lives of those he brought into the kingdom.

WE think it is about our preparation, that these are things we should do. And they are things God's people do. But consider your king with fear, because the sheep, those given the kingdom, didn't do these things to be prepared. They don't recognize themselves in the king's description. These are not what makes one fit for the kingdom, they are the description of those things done in the kingdom. We have some identity problems in the world today, but I will tell you that a goat that tries to look like a sheep is still a goat.

So who are the sheep - yes, the ones who visit the sick feed the hungry clothe the naked. They are the ones who are called by the gospel, enlightened by his gifts, sanctified and kept in the true faith. The preparation is God's, not ours. He has prepared a kingdom for his people before the foundation of the world, He has called them to be His own, He died for them and gives

them faith to keep them united with Him. God has called us to be His own, ordained before the foundation of the world. And in His grace, we are kept with him forever and ever.

But forever and ever includes now. If we are taken care of and tears are wiped from our faces in Glory, when does that glory start. There is a continuity between the future glory prepared by God and the life we live in now. If God takes care of people for eternity,, and we confess he does, do we not also confess he takes care of them even now. That is the preparation of God.

Why does we, the church, take care, of people? Because God lives in us, and God cares for people. It is not preparation for future glory but the love of God given in Christ acting in us now.

There are two ways to be ready for a test. You can see how much you can cram in your head the night before, and see if you remember enough to pass. Or you can do your work each day, complete what is before you, and let the test reveal what you already know. My confirmation students will tell you I always tell them to remember live their catechism for five minutes a day and not sweat the test. The world teaches us to prepare the night before, it says your time is too important, but God's preparation in us is for us to live in him. The kingdom of Glory is just a continuation of grace. As we show Christ in and with us, even as we visit the sick, and feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

And those who reject Christ, who reject him with their hearts and with their lives? That too is revealed, to their shame. The God who was not with them in this life remains not with them.

So rejoice. Live as Christ's redeemed. God's kingdom is prepared, now and forever. Amen.