

# *St. Augustine's* Sermons Calgary, Alberta

The Rev. Jonathan Gibson

*Philanthropy, Jesus Style*

*am, Holy Communion*

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The Text: Matthew 25:31 – 46:

## The Final Judgment

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 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. 35 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, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

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The words that were read this morning from the last verses of Matthew 25 bring to a close what is known as the Great Apocalypse. The word apocalypse means “to reveal, or “to make known”. In Matthew 24 Jesus makes known the overarching course of world history from the time of his Crucifixion and Resurrection through to His coming again at the end of the present age. He clearly states in chapter 24: 1. He IS coming back. 2. He doesn't know the hour or the day, and neither can we. 3. We must be ready at all times. He also said in the last days there would be a lot of trouble—an increasing darkness on planet earth: wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, deception, betrayal, an increase of wickedness, and on and on. On top of that, he said,

**"He who stands firm to the end will be saved."**

As we turn to the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew Jesus goes on to show what it means to stand firm to the end. He begins by telling a parable about ten virgins who were to have their lamps trimmed, with oil at the ready, to welcome the Bridegroom. The opening hymn we sang today is based on this story in Matthew 25:1-13. This is a parable that underscores the necessity to live our life constantly aware that Jesus could appear at any time. We could say that the lamp is the word of God and the oil is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who provides the fuel needed in order to understand and apply that light of the word. Those who stand firm are anticipating meeting the bridegroom as they give attention to the word of God, which is a lamp unto our feet. This is a story about preparedness.

Last week we looked at the parable of the servants entrusted with the talents. Here was a story that emphasized that those who stand firm are to make the most of the opportunities presented to us, as we use the abilities we have to further the Lord's work. This is a story about productivity.

The story we heard read this morning is one where Jesus teaches us that we are to stand firm by our willingness to extend mercy and compassion to other Christians who are in need of help. This is a story about philanthropy.

Preparedness, productivity and philanthropy are the three attributes Jesus teaches are visible in the lives of those who stand firm in the present.

So what does Jesus teach us about what it means to be philanthropic Christians? I will first give a definition of philanthropy and then go on to make the following three points:

Jesus will teach us this morning:

1. Don't overlook small chances to do good.
2. Don't ask for a receipt
3. Don't exclude anyone.

**Definition of Philanthropy:**

So let's look at a definition of philanthropy.

It comes from two Greek words: philo: which means brotherly affection, “anthropos” which means man. In the text Jesus speak about the actions done to others as those done to Jesus’ brothers.

It is important when looking at this passage that we understand that the recipients of the acts of compassion and mercy are other Christians. There are other texts that have clear teaching on how we are to relate to non-Christians. But this is not one of those texts. This is made very clear when we look at two other passages in the Gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew 12:49-50 are these words “And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” When Jesus says in Matthew 25:40 that doing ministries of mercy to the least, namely, his brothers, is doing them to him, he means, doing them to his disciples is doing them to him.

We see the very same teaching in Mathew 10:42, “Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” In other words, Jesus says that true Christians do ministries of mercy to Christians because they are Christians. And that’s one of the main ways that your Christianity is shown to be real.

James explains how this fits with faith as the way of salvation: James 2:15-17, “If a brother or sister [a disciple!] is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” If we don’t ever bear the fruit of practical love toward brothers and sisters—the least of them—our faith is dead and we are not saved. That’s Jesus’ point.

This does not mean that our works of compassion save us but they are indicative that we have received mercy. We in turn then want to extend mercy to those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So let me return to the word philanthropy for a minute. The first recorded usage of the word in English was in a 1650 sermon by Bishop Jeremy Taylor where he described philanthropy as “a God like excellence”.<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines philanthropy this way: *Love of mankind; the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well-being of others; practical benevolence.*

Now to talk about the “love of mankind” is a very broad and abstract definition. In order to see what philanthropy looks like in a concrete way Jesus gives to us clear example in the story for today, that are expressions of practical benevolence to fellow Christians.

This practical benevolence can be expressed with the following “don’t” statements:

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Jeremy  
*Works a* 1667 (1822, 1828, 1831, 1847–54)

1. Don't overlook small opportunities to do good.
2. Don't ask for a receipt
3. Don't exclude anyone.

### **1. Don't overlook small opportunities to do good.**

As we look at these verses it is striking that the examples of compassion presented to us by Jesus are things that are very ordinary. Look at verse 35:

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, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Jesus is clearly stating that it is as we express help to others in simple ways that we are exhibiting something of what it means to be sheep and not goats.

I think it is significant that Jesus uses these simple and unassuming acts as his example. It tells us that within the body of Christ there will always be opportunities to extend mercy to others in very tangible ways. The point of these examples is that while they are small acts, they are attributes that express we are followers of Jesus, along with preparedness and productivity. To live a life of compassion and mercy means that we are not going to be treating others, either judgmentally or with indifference.

Now there is something very arresting about the response of those whom Jesus calls the sheep in this passage. The arresting thing about this is that Jesus is clearly saying that the ultimate mark of an authentic Christian is the concern which he or she shows to brothers and sisters who are in need. The practical demonstration of love is the final proof. And note also that Jesus does not ask anyone to present his case or argue his cause. He asks no questions nor requests any evidence. He simply extends to this one group the invitation, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." Then he explains the basis of his choice. He has simply noted that when they had opportunity to help someone in need, they did it. Nothing more is required. It is sobering to realize that Jesus identifies himself with those in need. If you help them, he says, you are really helping me; and if you ignore them you are ignoring me.

### **2. Don't ask for a receipt:**

It is worth noting that the sheep are surprised by the criteria the King uses in selecting them. They were not even aware that in caring for others they were in fact caring for their king. But notice that the sheep are asked to take their place on the right hand of the throne because all through their lives their genuine faith has been producing its inevitable fruit of good works. Unthinkingly, unconsciously, born of love for Jesus Christ, they have been responding to the pleas and the needs of those about them. They kept no records, they expected no praise. For them it has been a glad privilege. They were unaware they were doing anything unusual, but found a real delight in meeting the needs of others. There was no hardship involved. They felt it was a continuing joy to be permitted to

minister in Christ's name. But not one deed performed in that way has ever escaped the eye of their watching Lord. There is no need for him to examine them. They had laid up abundant treasure in heaven because their lives illustrated clearly their true character.

This is what Jesus meant when in Matthew 7.16 he said “By their fruit you will know them.” Here the King knows those who are truly his by how they willingly shared Christ’s compassion with others. They did not look for a receipt but rather looked for ways to reach out to those brothers and sisters in real need.

So far we have learned:

Don’t overlook small opportunities to do good.

Don’t ask for a receipt.

### **3 Don’t exclude anyone.**

It is worth noting that this parable is not called the Sheep and the Wolves. This is because there is such a discrepancy between sheep and wolves that you could definitely distinguish between the two. However, when it comes to sheep and goats it is hard to tell them apart. In many ways they look very much alike. It is only the shepherd who can tell the difference. In the story Jesus says that the difference between the sheep and the goats this in how they treat other Christians. The sheep do not exclude others but the goats do. This is evident when in response to the goats lack of interest in those in need of clothing, water or a visit, ignored them. Jesus then says that as you do not do it to one of the least of these, you did it not unto me.

Yes, it is easier to be indifferent than it is to be compassionate. It is easier to think someone else will help and therefore I do not need to. And yet, such an attitude is one of exclusion and not in keeping with the character of someone who practices philanthropy Jesus’ way.

There is a prayer I came across last week that could be called the Goat’s Prayer. It goes like this:

"O thou pleasant, comfortable, kindly, good-natured God: How glad I am that I can look forward, with a reasonable degree of certainty, to another ordinary day. Keep me today from anything that taxes my faith from discomfort, from unnecessary strain, from unusual problems, especially those involving sickness or death, or the necessity of extending financial aid to relatives and friends.

Dear Lord, grant that nothing may occur which will disturb my satisfaction with the way I am, and the things I say, and the thoughts I think, the acts I do, or the many deeds I leave undone. Give me this day, in addition to my daily bread, the butter, meats, and sweetmeats that are my necessary diet, and let me not be troubled by qualms of conscience concerning the amount of time and money I spend on food and clothing,

pastimes, good and bad, and those pursuits which, while not of spiritual value, are the accepted hall-mark of the normal citizen of this enlightened community in this enlightened age.

About the future and the darkening trend of things, keep me from thoughtfulness. Events rush on, the world travails. Can screaming headlines prove thy hand's at work this very moment, bringing near that fateful cry, 'Behold! He comes!?' O, Lord, such disconcerting thoughts! Keep me from worrying about such things, and guide me safely to and from my office, and my home. Amen."

Yes this is said 'tongue and cheek but there is an important message which summarizes what this story is about.

An Application:

As a congregation we have an opportunity over the Advent and Christmas Seasons to become involved with caring for our brothers and sisters in Christ in a very practical way. The vestry has decided that half of our Christmas offering for this year is going to be used for a project called the Water School. Quoted below is the text found on the School's Home Page:

***The most effective vaccine against child death in Africa is a glass of clean water."***  
***-Kevin Watkins- Author of the UN Human Development Report-November, 2006***

*Here are the cold, hard facts according to the above report - "There are roughly two million child deaths every year as a result of not having access to clean water." Africa is hugely over represented in that number. The continent accounts for nearly a third or more, almost 40% of total child deaths from water related problems.*

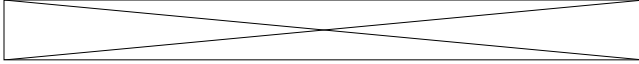
*The water SCH<sub>2</sub>OOL is doing something about this!*

*For several years, the team at the water SCH<sub>2</sub>OOL has worked in Uganda in east central Africa, to perfect a methodology of sustainable water purification that combines health education with training in the use of the Solar Water Disinfection System or SODIS.*

*Water with very high counts of E. coli and other deadly bacteria is purified in a few short hours by proper placement in readily available plastic bottles which are left in the sun. Children and caregivers are trained through schools and church teaching programs to use the system, being encouraged and held accountable by trained staff.*

*Case study results have been dramatic. Participating families in our target areas have experienced up to 80% reductions in water borne diseases.*

*SODIS is used at household level under the responsibility of the user. Therefore, the water SCH<sub>2</sub>OOL is not liable for any harm caused by a faulty or inadequate application of the water treatment process.*



*The SODIS system works 35 degrees either side of the equator. This just happens to be the same area of the world where the majority of people suffer and die from water borne diseases. The Water SCH<sub>2</sub>OOL is addressing this desperate situation by expanding our successful empowerment program to the rest of Uganda, Africa and other parts of the world. Trained personnel are now expanding the programs in Uganda and Kenya. Other countries will be added as soon as possible.*

Here is a project that is such a practical and tangible way for us to express our care for the least of these our brothers and sisters in Africa.

We will look forward to learning more about the Water SCH<sub>2</sub>OOL in January as one of the people working full-time with this work will be preaching at St. Augustine's on the fourth Sunday in January, the 25<sup>th</sup>.

We are called to be a community of compassion as we practice philanthropy, Jesus' style, as we remember:

1. Not to overlook small chances to do good.
2. Not to ask for a receipt
3. Not to exclude anyone.

