

Matthew 25:31-46

What are you talking about?

There are times that scripture feels really harsh and judgmental and this scripture from Matthew 25:31-46, where Jesus sits on his throne in judgment, separating the sheep from the goats, and saying to the sheep you are good and goats you are bad, well that might be enough for some to close the pages and move on. How are any of us to live up to the expectation when pretty much every day in this city, and really any community around the globe, we are confronted by the knowledge of someone who is hungry, thirsty, homeless, shivering, sick or in prison.

Now often I give an example or a story to set the stage for the sermon, but in worship today we were given the opportunity to watch a locally filmed and produced documentary called "*I Was Thirsty*". It follows the work of the *I Was Thirsty* organization here in Thunder Bay. "This grassroots initiative provided clean drinking water, human dignity, and compassionate connection to people experiencing homelessness and water insecurity. With the support of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, dedicated volunteers, and local partners, the project delivered over 616 cases of bottled water (that's nearly 15,000 bottles weighing 18,500 pounds) directly to encampments and shelters across the city. Volunteers drove over 2,400 kilometers to ensure no one was left behind."¹

So, we did not need to hear examples, we witnessed on the screen the deep need, as well as the compassion of the group and those who have volunteered to drive the miles and deliver water. Quite literally, it is only a drop of water in the bucket of need, but it is something. This year they are aiming to do this, not just two months but, from June through to the end of August. You can check out their website at [I was thirsty](#)

Back to the scripture itself...I am not sure how any of us can measure up to such expectations. Thing is, when you read this scripture, you see that both those who provided for those in need and those who did not provide were surprised. Both asked, "What are you talking about?" Neither realized that this taking care of the vulnerable was important, one group just did it and the other did not. What surprised both those described as sheep and those described as goats was that whatever they did or did not do meant that they had done it for Jesus or had not.

Now I will tell you that in the few words that I share with you today there is no way we can flesh out all the meaning or even the challenges that biblical scholars have had trying to figure out this whole passage. And it most certainly cannot be lifted from the pages of scripture and interpreted on its own. I am as much at a loss to tell you what is

¹ St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay, Annual Report 2025.

going on in this story as you yourselves might be. However, I don't believe that means we ignore it either.

First off, we know that God is a God of love, compassionate and slow to anger. But we also believe in a God for whom justice is a priority, where care for the vulnerable is a must, and grace abounds. When looking at a passage of scripture such as this, we hold all of this in tension. So, you might see why this is challenging. And we, as individuals and a church, are granted the same grace that everyone receives from God. We at times are vulnerable in different ways. It might be addiction to power, money, food, shopping, sex, drugs or alcohol. It might be that you are abused. It might be that those no one can imagine that you are struggling to pay the bills, feed yourself and your family. You may be lonely, hurting, grieving and feeling powerless.

It may be that at times you are like the sheep. You have seen a need and addressed it. Maybe it was the spare change you had in your pocket that you dropped in a cup, or that you brought food or drink to someone in need. It may be that you make sure your donations of money, clothing and household items goes to those organizations that you trust are helping the most challenged in our community.

Other days we are like goats. We buy our food, but don't buy anything extra for the food bank. We keep our car windows closed and avert any eye contact with those standing on the meridian with their make shift handwritten sign saying "anything helps". We continue to purchase for ourselves without any thought of the need around us or giving it just a passing thought.

Now this is not for me to judge you. I too am both a sheep some days and a goat other days. And this is why this passage is difficult. We are all both sheep and goat. There is no way we can take on all the need in the world by ourselves. It feels impossible to live this out.

So, a couple of things that may be helpful. One is that we are saved by grace not by our works. This is why we cannot hold this scripture separate from the rest of what Jesus taught and did. Still, maybe it is our intentions coupled with our actions that enable us to strive to live out our lives in response to the grace of God in our own lives.

We know that every life is precious. Every person, you and I included, every person is a child of God. We know that every person's life is of value. So, when you encounter need, see Jesus in that person. As we heard in the scripture that whatever you do or do not do, whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, or did not do it, that was Jesus you either helped or didn't help. At the very least, even if you do not have means to help someone in that moment, look at them. See their humanity. See the face of Christ in them and the image of God in them. Speak gently, smile, give something of yourself to them. In that way you honour their dignity. See them.

When you can give of your time, your money, your influence, your abundance. Do it from a place of grace. Do not try to earn your place in heaven. This is not what this kind

of giving is about. It is about love, dignity, value, kindness, goodness. As followers of Christ, we are always trying to become more and more shaped in the likeness of the one who gave his life for our redemption. We give from a place of joy and love.

Years ago, a friend said, we should give until it feels good. This giving of ourselves is not supposed to be painful. Sacrificial for sure. If nothing else, what Jesus was talking about in this scripture is giving of ourselves and our resources just simply to make the world a better, kinder, place. And it is what is required. Will we do it perfectly? Absolutely not. But that does not mean that we just give up. We give, we serve, we love, because that is what Jesus did and as followers of Christ hopefully, we desire to do the same, not out of fear of judgement, but because of grace.

In our actions, not only do we see the face of Christ in another, but just maybe others will see Christ in us. Maybe we will be the face of hope, joy, justice, kindness, goodness and above all else, love.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.