



# Deering Community Church

Pastor: Barbara Luckett Currie

AS YOU DO IT TO THE LEAST OF THESE YOU DO IT TO JESUS

Sermon for November 20, 2011

Scripture: Mathew 25:

Today we focus on the last of the three parables in chapter 25 of Matthew that Jesus told as he was preparing to leave his disciples, farewell instructions before he faces death. In the first parable, Jesus tells his disciples to be ready, to stay awake, to be watchful for the time of his return. In the meantime, according to the many interpretations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> parable with the cruel master and the 3 slaves given various amounts of Talent, prepare yourself, use your gifts wisely or as I preached it last week: do not be afraid, go forth and share the good news of Jesus, let your soul be set on fire so that your life and those you share with may be transformed.

Today is the last Sunday of our Christian year that began last year in Advent. It is celebrated as Christ the King or Reign of Christ Sunday. In today's scripture the story is told of the Son of Man as the King, sitting on the throne of glory with all the nations gathered round. And this King will separate the people just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he calls the sheep blessed and the goats accursed. The interesting thing to me is that none of the peoples knew why they were on the side they were on. This was the final exam and no one knew the answers. Don't you wish that the Bible were a book that had all the answers in the back! It's just not that way; however, if we have a solid foundation of Jesus' teachings and God's unconditional love, we can wrestle with the things that make us uncomfortable, and this passage does make me uncomfortable. How can a loving God decide to throw half the known world into eternal fire? I don't have all the answers, and I sure am glad that my faith doesn't say I have to belief literally in all that is in our Holy Scriptures.



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The essence of this parable is that Jesus is in all the suffering, needy people, as well as in all of us, and as we do good to them, we do good to Jesus. Now neither those sheep on the right or those goats on the left had any idea of Jesus being in these needy people; however, the sheep just naturally extended themselves in a caring way as a response to what God had already done for them through Christ, as a response to God's amazing love. Barbara Brown Taylor in her sermon on this passage points out that what matters is how we and the sheep and goats behave when we think God is not around. It is not in church, but in the everydayness of life when we have contact with the little ones, the least of these that Jesus is taking stock. How do we treat "the waitresses, the door-to-door salesman, the nursing home residents, the panhandlers, the inmates, the strangers in the grocery stores" to quote Rev. Taylor.<sup>1</sup> I could add a few more: the Jehovah Witness at your door, the workers at the dump, the drunk in the alley. Jesus claims to be in each of us, no matter how rich and famous or poor and marginalized. We are called to have a respectful, caring relationship with those we encounter, even when it only lasts for a moment. It's not enough just to be compassionate to those around us; we also are to go out of our way to show love in action to those that we might ignore because of their differences of race, social class, mental illness, or addictions to name a few. When we have compassion, such as the sheep in this parable, we realize our God is also their God, that we are very much sisters and brothers together with all people.

As we all know its stories that help us remember these truths, so I am going to tell you a first person story, adapted from the internet, from the point of view of a freshman boy in highschool:

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<sup>1</sup> *The Preaching Life*



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*One day, I saw a kid from my class walking home from school. His name was Zack. It looked like he was carrying all of his books, which I thought was a strange thing to do on a Friday. "He must really be a nerd, I thought to myself."*

*As I was walking, I saw a bunch of kids running toward him. They ran at him, knocking all his books out of his arms and tripping him so he landed in the dirt, his glasses flying. He looked up, and I saw this terrible sadness in his eyes. My heart went out to him. So, I jogged over to pick up his glasses. As I handed them to him, I said, 'Those guys are jerks. They really should get lives.'*

*He looked at me and said, 'Hey thanks!' There was a big smile on his face. It was one of those smiles that showed real gratitude. I helped him pick up his books, and walked part way home with him. He turned out to be a pretty cool kid. I asked him if he wanted to play a little football with my friends. He said yes. We hung out all weekend and the more my friends and I got to know him, the more we liked him.*

*Over the next four years, Zack and I became best friends. Zack was valedictorian of our class. I teased him all the time about being a nerd. He had to prepare a speech for graduation. I was so glad it wasn't me having to get up there and speak. He looked great. He was one of those guys that had really found himself during high school. He had more dates than I had and all the girls loved him. I could see that he was nervous about his speech. So, I smacked him on the back and said, 'Hey, big guy, you'll be great!' He looked at me with one of those looks (the really grateful one) and smiled. 'Thanks,' he said.*

*As he started his speech, he cleared his throat, and began 'Graduation is a time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years. Your parents, your teachers, your siblings, maybe a coach...but mostly your friends... I am here to tell all of you that being a friend to someone is the best gift you can give them. Let me tell you*



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*a story.'*

*I just looked at my friend with disbelief as he told the story of the first day we met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend. He talked of how he had cleaned out his locker so his Mom wouldn't have to do it later and was carrying his stuff home. He looked hard at me and gave me a little smile.*

*'Thankfully, I was saved. My friend saved me from doing the unspeakable.' I heard the gasp go through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy told us all about his weakest moment. I saw his Mom and Dad looking at me and smiling that same grateful smile.*

*Not until that moment did I realize the importance of what I had done. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse. God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way. Look for God in others. End of story.*

Thanks be to God for stories like this one. My prayer is that we can all open our eyes a bit wider and see those people that need a friend, those that are lonely and hurting. Remember that we are all God's beloved. As you do it to one of the least of these, you do it to Jesus. As we enter the holiday season, do whatever you can to share your blessings with others and remember to also be kind and loving to yourself.

Amen and Amen