Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday
November 22, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Matthew 25:31-46
Theme: It Will Be Like This: Come, You Blessed

[prayer]

Matthew 25 is the very last teaching Jesus delivers to his disciples before he is arrested, crucified, and then raised from the dead. While we call this last teaching the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, it is actually an apocalyptic drama that depicts the second coming of Christ. This second coming will be good news for the righteous but bad news for the unrighteous. A righteous person, Scripture says, is someone who puts their faith into action. At the end of time, the measure of God's judgment will not be a particular theology, creed, or statement of belief. The chief criterion will be whether you saw Jesus in the faces of the needy and gave yourself away to them in love. Sacrificial acts of love constitute "the weightier matters of the Law" by which we will all be judged (Matt 23:23).

"Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne" (vv. 31 CEB).

The CEB substitutes "Human One" for the more traditional "Son of Man." I like this editorial choice because it emphasizes the incarnation. The incarnation is key to interpreting this passage. Jesus came in the flesh to save all flesh. His ministry was not the salvation of souls to the exclusion of people's bodies. He was also focused on the very human needs of the people he came to serve – diseased limbs, hungry mouths, lonely hearts.

El Shaddai, El Elyon – the Lord God Almighty and The Most High God – creator of the heavens and earth, ruler over all creation, in whom all power and authority rests – the very same God of wrath who smote cities and routed armies and treated with Israel face to face – this God also chose to step into time and space and wrap Himself in our fragile flesh and blood so that He might share in solidarity

with us our aching, beautiful, broken humanity. We worship a God who forsook his royal station to become the absolute least of these: a tiny, squalling, helpless baby.

A baby is not what we think of when we imagine a king. It's not what the ancient Israelites imagined either. The Messiah was supposed to be a conqueror and a liberator, a great king who would defeat Israel's enemies.

But Jesus takes everything we think we know about what constitutes a king and his kingdom and turns it on its head. He was a conqueror, but not of armies and nations; instead, he conquered sin and death. He was a liberator, but he did not come to liberate Israel from the oppression of Rome; instead, he came to free people from the oppression of legalism. He was and is the Word of God embodied, a word that has always emphasized, above all else, mercy and justice. And in this passage from Matthew, he tells his followers that when we minister to the least of these – the hungry, the sick, the homeless, those who are imprisoned - we are in fact ministering to him.

"You will not always have me with you," Jesus says, "but you will always have the poor" (cf. Matt 26:11).

How often do we look at a homeless addict on the corner, with his cardboard sign, and feel filled with awe because we are, in fact, looking at the face of God? What is our first reaction: judgment? Do we always, without exception, show the least of these in our midst the compassion and mercy they are due, because they bear, in truth, the mark of divine royalty? Just as you and I are children of The Most High, are not even more so the refugee, the homeless veteran, the drug addict?

Jesus says that when we tend to the humanity of the weak and vulnerable, we are in fact tending to him. Likewise, when we ignore their humanity, we are ignoring him. We believe that God is always with us, but especially in the neighbor who needs us. We are called to look in every human face and see the face of Jesus looking back and treat that person with the same honor and dignity we would treat the King of creation.

We have the audacity to proclaim the Kingdom of God is here only when we are living as such. We continue the incarnation of Christ by following the kingly

example he set: treating every person as the dignified and divine image bearer that they are. The Kingdom of God is among us when we seek out the least of these, wrap them in royal robes of justice, and crown them with the mercy of Jesus Christ.

This parable reminds us that every one of us will face the judgment of God. But the good news is that, for those who have given themselves over to the Way of Jesus, the judgment has already been made. “Come, you blessed,” says Jesus. “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (v. 34).

To be blessed implies a prior relationship, a state of blessedness that already exists. What is this blessedness? Have you ever remarked, *I got more out of it than I gave*? When we give ourselves over to serving others, we enter into the sacred connection that exists between God, our neighbors, and ourselves. That sense of connection is what it means to be blessed. To know what it is to love and be loved in return – that is what we are made for. That is our purpose in this life.

The image of the Son of Man separating sheep and goats is an introspective tool designed to help each of us measure who and where we are as we grow in the likeness of Christ. Good works are not the price we pay to enter the kingdom of heaven. They are the fruit of our salvation, the proof that we have inherited the kingdom that is prepared for us, that the kingdom of God is indeed dwelling inside us. And because we have been transformed by God’s grace, our actions testify to that grace and transform the world in turn.

Salvation can include stunning moments of revelation, like Paul on the road to Damascus. But the bulk of salvation is subtler. God saves us from our small, petty, selfish lives by touching our hearts with love, persuading us to care for one another. And while we focus on giving ourselves over to the slow and patient work of loving our neighbors, God’s grace is doing the slow and patient work of sanctification, restoring His image inside us. That image includes God repeatedly and generously pouring out His love upon all people. God’s self involves the giving of self. And if we are created in the image of a freely giving God, then we are also created to freely give.

Imagine what the view will look like standing at the right hand of Jesus. Like the righteous in our Scripture lesson, we will be surprised to see the powerful,

cumulative impact of our acts of service spread out behind us. And we will be surprised at who we have become – perfected at last in love.

Do we see Jesus in each other? Do we see and bless our common humanity?

I'll close with a final poem from Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes: *Deus absconditus*.

> *Disbelievers in King Jesus have constructed a palace,*
> *and designed a grand throne, and point to it proudly and say,*
> *"See, there's no one there!"*
>
> *Indeed. He is nowhere near.*
> *The Ruler of our Hearts, the sneaky Sovereign of the Universe,*
> *has gone AWOL, out into the suffering of the world.*
>
> *If you do not find him there, you will not find him,*
> *until he finds you, and returns you*
> *to the fold with your siblings.*[1]

May it be so. Amen.

[1] https://unfoldinglight.net/2026/11/20/deus-absconditus/