

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Righteous and accursed, sheep and goats, right hand and left hand, at the end of days, the end of this phase of creation, all that will be left will be to go before Jesus, sitting upon the throne of judgement, and have the measure of our life weighed. And there will be one simple measure to which our fates will be determined. One simple measure to inherit the kingdom or to be sent to the eternal fire. Either you did it to me, or you did not do it to me. And how will we know? How will we know if we did it or not to Christ? How will we know if we sought and served Christ in all peoples? If we simply did it to the least of these, we will have done it to Christ, for Christ. But, we have to ask ourselves, is that what we really want? Are we here in Church because we hope to one day inherit the kingdom? Do we strive daily to seek and serve Christ, to seek out those who are clearly the least and extend them a hand, extend them that reflection of love we experience from Christ every week here at this table?

Our faith is enough to receive God's grace. If we have faith in Christ, if we profess that faith, we are promised all the rewards that come to us through God's grace. But the question remains, how do we show that we have faith? Is it enough to simply claim that faith or is there something else that is expected of us once we accept the reality that faith means for us in this life? In today's gospel we get a pretty clear list of what is expected of us. This isn't a checklist of ministries to make sure you offer from your church. This isn't a checklist of activities for you to engage in. Rather, this list reflects the least of what we are compelled to do if we have faith. For if we have faith, we cannot simply turn inwards and ignore those who suffer, who are truly the least of these, who are members of Christ's

family by virtue of their being a beloved part of creation. Their suffering occurring not as punishment or judgement, but rather as a reflection that in this creation we have created systems that are unjust, that punish for trivial things, that remove humanity from others so that we can feel superior, so that we can ignore the least as member's of the family, for how can they be family if they aren't part of creation. So, we are called to express our faith, to reflect the love of Christ, through some simple actions directed at the least in our community.

Are we doing that? Do we meet the qualification: "you did it to me"?

How do we know?

Often there are barriers to doing what we are called to do to show our faith in serving Christ through serving those who need it most.

Time is a great barrier that stops us all. There simply isn't enough time in the day to do what is required to take care of our own obligations, to go to work, to prepare dinner, to spend time with family, to relax and decompress from the day or week, there simply isn't enough time to do more. I mean come on, you give up your Sunday morning to come to church when you could be sleeping in, so what else can we ask of you?

Money is the other great barrier. We often do not have enough money to support our own lifestyles so why would I spend more than a few dollars to help those whose lifestyles prevent them from being successful. Why would we spend money here in this church that helps anyone else other than me and the things that I want to get out of this place.

There is a further set of barriers that I think are often the driving forces behind time and money as the two that are most often put forward. These are comfort, knowledge, and history. We are often uncomfortable with being around others who are not like us, so it is hard to overcome that unease in order to be present, at a mission table, among drug users and the homeless. But, why are we uncomfortable? Are these not also members of Christ's family? Building out of that sense of comfort (or lack thereof) we often lack knowledge of how to help others, and so pass on opportunities to engage in the real work of our faith, assuming others who are more aware will take care of it. And lastly, when we lack the history of service, when we lack the cultural identity of living into service to the least in real and tangible ways, it can be hard to get the large and complex gears turning again when they've been stuck in place for 30, 40 years or more.

Today we mark the end of our church year. Next week we begin in earnest our preparations for the coming of Christ, both for the first time once more and also for that eventual second coming that will mark the end of creation as we know it, ushering in a new understanding. As we prepare for Christ to come and take his place on the throne of judgement, fully realized in the end of times as much as it is in that manger in Bethlehem, we must ask: how shall we prepare for the coming of Christ?

The end of this phase of creation will mark the end of time, and while the end of our time in this creation may precede this event, we will still have to face that seat of judgement. In our faith, we trust in the power of God's grace and forgiveness. We know that we will die, and yet, Christ has already conquered death through his death and resurrection. We know that we are sinners, and yet are forever forgiven through that

sacrificial act of Christ on the cross. And yet, we still must ask, do we seek to inherit the kingdom through entitlement, a sense that it is already ours so there's not much else to do, or will we seek to inherit through our faith, and the expression of that faith through the work we do in our lives? For, it is our faith that informs us that, as it's been said, love wins, so if we know that deeply in our hearts, that love will ultimately win, has already won, do we simply hoard that to ourselves, or do we reflect this reality to the world? God's grace and forgiveness may be all encompassing, but I for one am not willing to tempt that grace by knowing through faith I was supposed to serve the least but choosing not to because I was saved anyways.

And it's not as if opportunities to serve the least among us are lacking. The least of these, who again Christ refers directly to as his family, are constantly among us, in our congregation, stumbling into our building seeking a safe, warm, welcoming space to be dry and warm for a moment, to eat a meal (perhaps their only meal of the day) of a granola bar, crackers, cold Chef Boyardee ravioli, and a kool aid juice pouch, to enjoy the simple pleasure of a hot cup of coffee, without feeling like they are intruding, without feeling like they are a burden, or worse yet a threat, the least of these are here in this place, in this city, in this world. So, how will you serve them?

How will you feed the hungry?

How will you give drink to the thirsty?

How will you welcome, truly welcome with open arms and no qualifications attached, the stranger?

How will you clothe the naked?

When will you visit the sick, the imprisoned?

What does your faith call you to do?

These are simple questions with simple answers that come across as daunting, intimidating, even crippling, and I want you to know that I know that. I face those same apprehensions. I do not always live into this call of our faith. I do not always seek and serve Christ in all peoples, at all times. Sometimes I just want to figure my own stuff out. Sometimes I honestly can't give the time or money that is required. But, if I'm honest with myself, it's not as often as I claim it to be. And this is where the reckoning comes in. This is where the wrestling of faith and all that it entails comes in. This is where I, and you, have to decide what it really means to live into our faith, what it really means to serve the least of these, what it really means to reflect the love of Christ, the love of God that is promised to us in our faith to the world.

You and I can do this. We can accomplish this call. We can do these simple tasks that have immeasurable impact on those who receive from us. We will not always be successful in living into this call, all of the time, but we have to at least try. We cannot make excuses, letting barriers that loom large in our minds but are really minor bumps that are effortlessly easy to overcome, prevent us from living into our faith. We cannot assume that if others are doing it, that's good enough to cover us too. We have to own our own faith. We have to own our own living into our faith. And, when we do, we will be guaranteed of God's grace and forgiveness when the end comes. We will know and embody the fact that love wins. We will be the righteous, the sheep, the right hand. Go forth and do it, live into your faith, serve the least of these, and know you are doing the simple acts of our faith.

Amen.