

“Is It Ever Enough?”
A, Pentecost 25; 10:00 am
Matthew 25:31-46; November 26, 2017
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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I. JUDGMENT DAY!

It's the stuff of movies! Of big-screen, grand drama!
Of power and might, in all its glory, seated on “The
Throne” even, reigning over the quivering masses.

³¹When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the
holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his
glory:

³²And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall
separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his
sheep from the goats:

³³And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats
on the left.

³⁴Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come,
ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for
you from the foundation of the world, for low, thou hast: ...

And...the action cuts to commercial break, and we are
left hanging. In suspense—at least through several
tedious commercials—from laundry soap that removes
that pesky ring around the collar, to the new tasty
McSomething that's all the rage, to the best, most

trustworthy insurance company to entrust your
family's lifelong security to..... to.....

Or, after we've endured all those ads, we might, with
even more great drama, be informed that tonight's
episode is over and No! Don't say it! We will have to
tune in *next* week to find out just what happened to
the ovines and capricines?

Why?! Why, when the Judge is sorting the people
out, were the sheep told to go on his right and the
goats on his left? Why were they seemingly deemed,
“good?” Worthy? And, if they are ushered in to what
we presume is the “good place,” what will happen to
those who are still out there? Those old goats?!
Those young goats! And everyone in between. What's
the Shepherd Boss got us his sleeve for them?!

II. CHRIST THE KING/REIGN OF CHRIST

It's the stuff of movies for sure! And, it's the stuff in
the bible that comes out of left field and makes our
skin crawl just a little. Who *is* this high and mighty
“Son of Man?!” Why does the bulletin suddenly
declare this “Christ the King Sunday” when we've
been following Jesus, the lowly servant minister,
teacher and healer all these months?

Did Jesus suddenly have a change of personality, for
this one Sunday out of the year? This “Reign of Christ
Sunday” tucked ever-so-slyly between the 24th week
after Pentecost and the First Sunday in Advent?

There are some preachers and congregations who run and hide when this passage comes up in the lectionary. We are not comfortable with this portrayal of Christ—the “Son of Man coming in his glory, sitting on the throne, *judging* the nations...”

That sounds a lot more like “The Late Great Planet Earth” or the “Left Behind” series. Apocalyptic literature we in the progressive stream of church and biblical scholarship tend to run screaming from!

But, running away will get you nowhere. For Christ, Jesus, the Son of Man, *does* wield power and influence over us and our lives—or should *if* we truly want to call ourselves Christian—Christ-followers. If we walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

Judgment, discretion, discernment are *all* a part of the journey of faith. For every path we choose, every fork in the road, every turn we decide to take or not take, is ultimately a judgment call, and Christ is the Judge of our lives in that sense, and *does* reign over us—if we will put on that mantle and seek to walk in his ways.

This scene—in *addition* to jolting us into remembering that life and faith *are* about judging our pathways and sorting out our options—is a jolt into the profound realization that we have a Choice. Capital C—in every encounter. In every seeing, hearing or responding.

“Choose this day whom you will serve.”

It’s at the core of our Judao-Christian faith and heritage. Those words were first given to the Children of Israel, waaaayyyy back in the book of Deuteronomy with good old Joshua, Moses’ successor.

Choose this day, as well, whether you can imagine God in Christ in many *different* ways. A Loving Shepherd, cradling the lost sheep and bringing it home. A Leader Shepherd, whose sheep know the sound of his voice and, though they get lost sometimes, wander back to the path. And/or, a Sorter Shepherd, giving a little prod in the side to those in the flock who really get off the path and fail to see and hear and care for the others in need?

III. ALL ABOUT CHOICES

It’s all about choices, and the choice before us now is:

Sheep or goats? Which do *you* wanna be? It’s not like one was the good guy and one was the bad guy from the get-go! No, they were *all* in the flock. Part of the group, on the team. In the Shepherd’s fold. But, some got sorted out as good and responsive, and others as indifferent and uncaring. Letting life, others and themselves walk idly by.

IV. WHERE FAITH MEETS LIFE

Choose life! For ourselves and for our neighbor that we're called to love. Making that choice sometimes means we have to take a stand—if Christ is truly reigning in our hearts and lives.

This week, a group of over 300 hundred Christian theologians attending the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, wrote and released the Boston Declaration.

The group called for repentance and change in Christianity in the United States. They, and many Christians across the country, feel that much of what calls itself Christianity is in a crisis. The faith, in many ways, has abandoned the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They called for a reformation of sorts—not unlike what happened 500 years ago this month in Europe, when Luther and others stood up and said, “The Church has gotten off the path; has forgotten what Jesus Christ and following his Way are all about.

The Boston Declaration is ten pages long (not quite 95 theses!), and covers many areas of faith, belief and practice. I have posted it on the bulletin board and will make copies if you'd like to read it for yourselves.

Here's the core message:

“We are not here merely to denounce, however. The most important thing we can do as Christian theologians is announce the good news of the Gospel. The good news is the radical inclusivity of God, for God so loved the world. Not just some in the world, but all—even the world of animals and plants and the entire ecosystem.

From the Boston Declaration:

“We believe in a God who holds all difference within God's own life and in whom there is no one or no people who are distant from God's justice, merciful love, and presence (Micah 6:8; Acts 10:34-35). We affirm the beauty and humanity of all people in their manifold difference--race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and religion--as reflecting God's image through lives of love and hope. We believe the Jesus Way calls us to the possibility of living in a world where all can love and be loved, and live into joy.”

V. WHEN DID WE SEE YOU?

The reigning Christ reminds us today, as we round the bend from Thanksgiving into Advent, that “living into joy” –living the gospel, means to wake up, pay attention, and be ready. Ready for Christ to come—in

unexpected ways, in the guise of the stranger, in the plea for help from those in need—physically and spiritually.

Katherine Shafler, a psycho-therapist, building on Maya Angelou, wrote quite a piece recently on how we do just that. Not as prophetic, perhaps, as the Boston Declaration, but profound and pointed advice for how we do in a practical way what Christ, the Son of Man, was trying to get us to.

She says,

Maya Angelou suggests there are four questions that we're all unconsciously asking each other *all the time*.

We ask the people we love, and we ask the people we encounter as we go about our everyday lives: the cashier who takes your coffee order, the jogging neighbor you wave to from the car on the way to work, the elderly woman sitting across from you on the train.

The four questions rarely get asked with words, just as they're rarely answered with words.

They're almost always silent questions, because they're almost always unconscious.

Here are the 4 critical questions:

1. Do you see me?
2. Do you care that I'm here?
3. Am I enough for you, or do you need me to be better in some way?

4. Can I tell that I'm special to you by the way that you look at me?

Whether it's your kids, your colleagues, your partner, or really anyone in your community, when someone feels genuinely appreciated by you, it's because you treat them in such a way that affirmatively answers each question pretty consistently. It's because when you look at them, you actually take the time to see them.

We all do this. We blaze through darling moments *every single day*.

Slow down, and though it feels strange: *take a second to actually look at another person*.

Just one extra second. Literally.

And show some love! Literally. Let the love you feel show on your face, in your eyes and in your quality of presence.

Slowing down and taking the one extra second is how you connect.

Connection is not based on how much time we spend with someone or what we do with them, connection is always based on quality of presence.

On some level, we're all desperate to be more present. The four questions are impossible for you to answer unless you're present.

Shafler concludes with a suggestion to experiment with this for one week to start. Put the number 4 on your mirror, on your computer or phone wallpaper; heck, write it on your palm like we used to do in gradeschool.

Let the number be a cue to help you remember to answer the questions, not out loud, but on your face, in your touch, in your eyes, *with the quality of your presence*. Taking the one extra second doesn't have to be constant to be successful. Just do it as you remember to, do it as you please, and that will be enough.

VI. CHOICES TO LOVE UNENDING

Choices. “Choose this day whom you shall serve.”

“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you **life** and death, blessings and curses. Now **choose life**, so that you and your children may live.” (Dt. 30).

Is it as simple as that? Remembering the number 4 and practicing a one-second “quality of presence?” Or, must we be always doing *more*? Passages like these—sorting out of sheep and goats, can raise our anxiety and just add to a heavy load. That’s why we’re tempted to go running when we hear them! Can’t we just relax and bask in the fullness and satisfaction of a hearty Thanksgiving feast?

Is it ever enough? Can we ever do enough for God? Can we ever see the hungry around us and respond enough with food? Give to the thirsty enough to drink? Find enough homes for those with no bed. Clothing for

those who are shivering? If we do all those things on one day, but the next day are tired and overwhelmed by the constant barrage of need, then what?

Eric Elnes: “To me, all of life's questions really only boil down one that is so simple that it cuts through all the rest and confronts me until I must respond with an honest, yes-or-no answer: Do I give my life to love?”

You must give yourself to love
If love is what you're after
Open up your hearts, to the tears and laughter
And give yourself to love, give yourself to love
(Kate Wolf)

So, on this Reign of Christ Sunday, what is reigning supreme in our lives? Is it busyness and anxiousness about the coming busy season, so that we’re too distracted to see our brothers and sisters around us in need?

Is it the swirl of too many opinions about what those needs are, and whether those folks deserve are help? Or is it the still, small voice of calm that brings us back to our core—to a place of surrender. To give our lives, our selves to love, and let the Son of Man sort that out. Our intentions, our motives, our actions—in every brief second; in each encounter with another soul.

“Let the peace of Christ **reign** in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” (Col. 3:16)

It is enough. Amen.

The Sheep and the Goats

31-33 "When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left.

34-36 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what's coming to you in this kingdom. It's been ready for you since the world's foundation. And here's why:

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

37-40 "Then those 'sheep' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?' Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one

of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'

41-43 "Then he will turn to the 'goats,' the ones on his left, and say, 'Get out, worthless goats! You're good for nothing but the fires of hell. And why? Because—

I was hungry and you gave me no meal,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was homeless and you gave me no bed,
I was shivering and you gave me no clothes,
Sick and in prison, and you never visited.'

44 "Then those 'goats' are going to say, 'Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or homeless or shivering or sick or in prison and didn't help?'

45 "He will answer them, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you failed to do one of these things to someone who was being overlooked or ignored, that was me—you failed to do it to me.'

46 "Then those 'goats' will be herded to their eternal doom, but the 'sheep' to their eternal reward."