**Study for Stewardship Sunday #3 Oct. 27, 2024 – Matthew 25:31-46**

**The Challenge of Discipleship:** *Compassion*

**Focus Question:** *When in the previous week did someone extend compassion to you?*

**word** *of life* **“Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”** Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 25:31-46

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 31“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the *angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’ 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

This text is often referred to as the Last Judgment, describing the end of time when the Son of Man returns. Jesus uses the phrase “Son of Man” to describe himself sitting on the throne with all the angels at the time of judgment. All nations gather before him.

The age-old questions about the second coming of Christ – *when?* and “*what sign?”* – are answered in a surprising way: Christ comes now, in the “least.” The poor and the suffering are signs of Christ’s presence.

1. *How does Christ connect and identify with those in need?*

 Jesus uses the image of a shepherd who divides the sheep from the goats. This would have been a commonly understood image. Sheep and goats mingle and graze together in the pastures during the day; but at night, or when the sheep are to be sheared or the goats milked, they are separated. The Great Shepherd is the shepherd for both the sheep and goats and knows them all.

Note that neither those identified in the parable as the sheep nor the goats knew who it was that they were serving (or not serving). They did not act (or fail to act) to earn Jesus’ favor or to gain their salvation. Rather, the faithful lived out their faith daily in the ordinary actions and service to others in need. They are called “blessed” – the word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes to describe the faithful disciple (Matthew 5:1-12). They have an *attitude* of a servant, reaching out and caring for those in need with the heart of Jesus. They fulfill what Jesus described earlier in Matthew as the great commandment: to love God and to love the neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Followers of Jesus of every time and place are to act with the same attitude of servanthood and compassion.

his parable sheds light on the sins of omission – the things we are called to do that we fail to do. It is one thing to admit and confess our sins of commission, naming the wrongs we have done. We can often readily identify and name our sinful actions. But it is a more difficult task to name and identify those things we failed to do – those needs we did not even recognize. This passage shakes us to our core. The world is big; the needs are great.

1. *What are some sins of omission, those things left undone?*

The parable of the Last Judgment leads directly in Matthew’s Gospel into the account of the passion and death of Jesus. Just as Jesus has identified in the parable with the least and the suffering, so he enters into his own suffering and death.

1. *What role does compassion have in this passage?*
2. *What is the surprise in this passage?*

**word** *among us*

Small, seemingly insignificant and forgotten deeds done in everyday living are lifted up as service to Jesus himself. The sheep in the parable today were surprised – unaware of the good things they were doing. Their ministry had become a natural response to being a part of Christ’s family, a natural outflowing of life, an internalized faith and lifestyle – so much so that they were unaware of the good works they were doing as they shared God’s love.

Following Jesus means being an every-day disciple, not just one who shows up on Sundays. Instead, the challenge of being a disciple is to live with eyes open, seeing Christ in each person and extending the love of Christ to each.

1. *Identify ways you could live out this passage and “do” for Christ.*
2. *What attitude does Jesus want us to embrace as we encounter others with needs?*
3. *What does it feel like when someone extends compassion to you?*
4. *Is it easier to give than to receive acts of kindness? Why so?*

What needs do you see around you? Look closely, for you just might be surprised at whom you might meet in your neighbor, in the poor in your community, in the imprisoned, the lonely, and the hungry. It just might be the very face of Christ in your midst. Close your eyes and imagine driving home from your congregation. As you imagine driving by buildings, and people, try to identify people who might have special needs. The challenge of the disciple is to extend compassion today, tomorrow and then the next day.

1. *How might you get involved in helping others, especially the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and those imprisoned?*
2. *How might your congregation further help those in need?*

Yet compassion is not the only challenge for disciples. Each day we, as disciples of Jesus, struggle with forgiveness, grace, responsible living, courage, love, stewardship and other issues. Sin yanks at us to go our own way with no regard for anyone but ourselves. Thankfully, we have other Christians to encourage, support, and challenge us. We have God’s Word to ground us in the teachings of Jesus. We have the Spirit to nudge and prod us.

1. *How have the challenges of being a disciple of Jesus changed for you over the years?*
2. *Today, what is the greatest challenge for you as a disciple of Jesus?*
3. *What might help you face that challenge?*

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O Christ, continue to teach us to be your disciples. Forgive us when we seem slow to learn. Challenge us to grow in your Word. Grant that all the people of the earth, now divided by the power of sin, may be united under the glorious and gentle rule of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

**Dig Deeper**

1 John 4:7-12

 *last* **word**

This week, each day, name your greatest challenge as a disciple of Christ.

God to help you with that challenge.