

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Second to the Last Sunday in Trinity**

Text: 25: 31-46

Theme: Judgment Day

Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". . . .And the King will say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." (vss. 34, 40)

This morning we turn our attention to the last things and the return of our Lord in Glory. We call this Second to the Last Sunday, Judgment Day, a designation that has struck fear and anxiety in many Christians through the ages. The incredible picture of this end of age event in Matthew as we have heard invites us to consider where we will be on that day when Jesus sitting on His heavenly throne separates the sheep from the goats. We confess this event every Sunday in the Nicene Creed: *He shall come again with glory, to judge both the living and the dead.* How about you? Is this a day you are looking forward to or does the thought of it prompt doubt and fear? Does it make you wonder: *How am I going to be judged on that Day? Am I going to be counted among the sheep or will I be numbered with the goats?* It is our Lord's desire this morning for you to better understand what this day is about and to strengthen your anticipation and sense of joy as you would look forward to it as the beginning of the Better Day for you.

Yes, we call this Judgment Day, but only in the sense that it is the final judgment that is to be made in God's plan of salvation. The apostles present for us in the New Testament actually four different judgments concerning the working out of his plan of salvation. Two of them are hidden in eternity as the first and the last of these judgments, and two that are manifested and worked out in between in the context of space and time. Understanding the first three judgments provides for us the necessary backdrop by which to understand aright this great event at the end of time so that, as the people of God, we may truly look forward to it with great joyous anticipation.

Yes, it is true. There is a point in eternity when God appoints those whom he would adopt to be his blameless sons and daughters. Or to put it in terms of the image of our text: yes, there is a time in eternity when the sheep are counted as such by the Divine judgment of the Lord God. But here is where the confusion has centered about what we call Judgment Day. This judgment in eternity is *not* what our text this morning is presenting. It is not the Lord's judgment at the end of time, but rather His judgment that took place before the foundations of the world that marks this heavenly designation. In this regard, the Lord made up his mind to you one of his own before He even created the world. As the apostle teaches in Ephesians one: *He chose you before the foundation of the world that you should be holy and blameless before him. In love, He predestined you for adoption . . . according to the purpose of His will (Eph. 1: 4-5).* Yes here even before He carried out his plan of creation, He knew you. The

Lord God knew of your problem of sin that you inherited from the Fall of Adam, and He judged that you were to be cleansed and made blameless to be a chosen one for adoption to become a child of God. In the language of our text, He chose you to be one of his flock as a part of the what has been called the sheep-hood of all believers. From the standpoint of eternity, you have been His child before you were ever born. His eternal judgment elected you to be among the sheep at the end of time before time even came into existence.

But then you say, *but He did not choose everyone to be among the sheep. Some will be goats.* Yes, tragically that is so. As Jesus said, many are called but few are chosen. Yes, there will be goats - those who simply will not have the Good Shepherd gather them into his flock. So then as some have thought - we have to wait till the end of time to know if we were chosen before the foundations of the world to be His own. Then we can make this judgement and that is why we call it Judgment Day. No, no, no. You do not have to wait until this last day of Judgment when the Lord returns to find out if, in fact, this is so for you. There are two additional Judgment Days that have also taken place already, and both of them in space and time. The first one took place two thousand years ago and we call it Good Friday. There on the cross of Christ, God passed judgment on the guilt of your sins. Your Lord Jesus received the wages of your sin and the Father executed his justice punishing his only begotten Son so that you might be reckoned pure and holy in his righteousness and forgiveness. There in the cross of Christ, your creator God judged you to be holy and blameless. There He forgave you all your sins and counted the righteousness of His Son to be your righteousness, now and forever.

But then there has occurred a third Judgment Day and this one occurred in your life time. In your baptism, He made the judgment that it was time to adopt you into his family as his child. It was then that the Good Shepherd took you out of the wilderness of your sin and brought you into his flock. Here in your baptism the Lord joined you to Christ the crucified and made you a participant of the judgment day on Good Friday. So the day that Christ made you His own is not here in glory on the last day, but rather it has taken place in your baptism with Christ the crucified in the context of His cross. Judgment Day on the cross has become Adoption Day for you in your baptism. There that adoption before the foundations of the world came to you in your time as you were adopted into His family. There and then He fulfilled his predestining will to make you his own to for you to join the sheephood of all believers who will be gathered there before the Lord in glory.

Sooo, Judgment Day - the day of glory in our text - is neither a day when Jesus will finally make the judgment if we are going to make it into the Kingdom as one of His own, nor is it a day when we get to finally make that judgment. His judgment began before the foundations of the world and He has manifested and worked out that judgment in the cross of Christ and in our baptism. Then what kind of Judgment Day is

this last one at the end of time? In what sense is Jesus going to be judging the living and the dead? We need to recall some teaching from James. It was James who taught us that if you say you would show your faith apart from works, he will show his faith by his works. For as he instructed us, faith without works is dead (James 2:17-18). It is not that works makes faith alive, rather it is that works reveal a faith that is alive. The tree that is alive bears fruit, but the fruit does not make the tree alive. James is teaching us that our faith is recognized by others according to our works.

The key question, however, is *WHEN* . . . when will others be able to see our true faith in Christ by our works? In this life, others may well give glory to God because of your works, and you may do for theirs - but they will not know you are a Christian by your works of love - that is, not yet. Remember how Jesus indicated in the parable of the weeds and the wheat, that even laborers in the Church are not in a position to make accurate judgments that would be able to separate the weeds from the wheat - the sons of the Devil from the sons of God. The truth of the matter is this: we can search our own hearts for faith and it is known by God, but a clear judgment about faith by works in this life is just not possible - not by others . . . and not even by us. The Law may show us what a good work *is*, but it cannot not show you your good works. The Law always accuses you of sin; it does not accuse you of good works. In this life your good works are an article of faith.

But now, someday . . . some *Day* its going to be different. On that glorious day, the light will shine on you in such a way that all will know that you belong to Christ. On that day, it will be made manifest to the entire world that you are indeed a true believer. And that someday is what is Jesus is speaking of in our text. It is the *last* of the four Judgment Days. God is finished with His Judgments. Now is a time when we shall be able to make the judgments. On this Judgment Day, Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats, and all will be able to see, why each is on the side that Jesus has drawn. On this day Jesus will turn the tables. In this life, as a new creation in Christ, you honor Him in all that you do. He gets all the glory . . . in your prayers, your praise, your thanksgiving, and your works of faith that serve your neighbor, day in and day out. *Sola gloria Deo!* To God alone be glory! But on Judgment Day, Jesus is going to honor you. He will parade your fruit of faith for all creation to behold. They will shine like jewels in your crown of life. Just you wait and see . . .and so will everybody else!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. A-men.