

The 2nd Last Sunday of the Church Year
19 November, Anno Domini 2017
St. Matthew 25:31-46
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. Deliver me, O Lord, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you, you deceitful tongue? A warrior’s sharp arrows, with glowing coals of the broom tree! Woe to me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! Too long have I had my dwelling among those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war!”

So writes the psalmist in Psalm 120. That is only one of countless psalms that give voice to the cries of God’s people who live in this world surrounded by evil, hatred, and an endless stream of wickedness. We find ourselves completely dismayed at the depths perversity and seething rage that runs wild through society. It seems like every day someone new is added to our prayer list because they have been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease or lost a loved one. Children are neglected and abused. The powerful abuse the weak. Men treat women as objects rather than precious gifts. Even within our own flesh we see all the things that we hate about the sinful world. We lie, we cheat, we steal, we humiliate, we despise and we somehow justify it all as Christian.

Who wouldn’t want out? A Christian can’t help but long to be separated from it all, to be spared the pain and heartache, to no longer have to see and taste all the bitterness that sin has unleashed in this world. We want it to be over. We want deliverance. We want to be separated and to know nothing but the joy of Christ. We don’t want to be sick or tempted or persecuted or afraid anymore. We don’t want to bury any more loved ones. We don’t want to get into any more fights. We want to live. We want to rest. We want peace.

And that day will certainly come even though it seems like God is taking too long. Our full salvation will be brought to completion. This world of sin and darkness will not endure forever. At the proper time, when all of the elect have been prepared by the preaching of the Gospel, then the heavens will

be torn apart, the trumpet blast will sound, and the Lord Jesus, once crucified and now risen, will take His seat on the throne of judgment. Then, finally, there will be separation. We will be separated from all that is evil forever. Then the believing baptized children of God will be gathered together with one another, away from the devil and the unbelieving world and our hope will be vindicated. What the world hated and despised and scorned will be glorified and everything they loved and worshiped will be burned up in judgment.

But that separation isn't now. Now the wheat is mixed in with the tares and you can't always tell them apart. Now, there are still sheep that need to be gathered into the flock. We don't know who they are so we try to gather everyone because that's exactly who Christ died for and desires to be saved. Now, we must suffer and struggle under the horrible desires of our flesh that would lead us to death. We must wage the bitter war against temptation and suffer the bruises and bear the scars. Now we must endure the hate-filled assaults of the world against the holy faith, assaults that are meant for Christ Himself. Satan can't directly attack Christ so he will attack us - our families, our health, our churches, our reputations. He will draw the flesh into sin and then torture the conscience with the searing heat of the divine Law's just judgment.

Now the sons of light are scattered among the sons of darkness so that those who yet dwell in darkness may see. Light is needed in the darkness even though the darkness doesn't necessarily want it. The Gospel of Christ's mercy is desperately needed in a world that is filled to overflowing with brokenness and pain and death. Your family and your neighbors need your mercy and your pity. Like you, they suffer. Like you, they are hurting. They make foolish choices that land them in prison, that tear apart their families, that leave them without their daily bread. But by the grace of God we could be them and they us. We are no better, no more worthy of saving. But in Christ, that doesn't matter. In Christ, we are set free from the need to figure out who is worse and who is better because all of us are hopelessly rotten, lost in our sin. We are set free from the foolish idea of trying to surround ourselves with success and winners. It isn't the sleek or the strong or the righteous who long for a Savior. It is the downtrodden, the weak, the tired. It is the depressed and the mentally unstable, the drunks and the addicts, the abused and the lawbreakers - people who know and who are terrified by their guilt and shame. People like you and me.

God is not impressed by how well you take care of yourself, how you meet your goals, how well put together you are, how secure and how comfortable you are able to make yourself in this life. He didn't create any of us to live for ourselves. That is what the goats were too busy doing to notice the sick, the imprisoned, the naked, and the hungry. Sure, if Jesus had been there, they would have jumped at the opportunity to do something for Him and impress Him. But walk into one of those smelly nursing homes to visit someone who won't remember me anyway, sit on the other side of prison's iron curtain to listen and to offer an eternal hope to drug dealers and murders even when all earthly hope is long gone? Who would notice? Who would pat me on the back? What will I get in return! I've certainly got better things to do.

Repent. What did you or could you offer to Christ for saving you from the place that was prepared for the devil and his angels? Are you holier, more pure, more worthwhile? No. That's why He offered His precious Blood for you. That's why He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried for you. He didn't do all that on account of your greatness. He did it because the Father loves you and knows that you would only destroy yourself if He didn't. Jesus knew that you would be condemned forever if He didn't throw Himself into Satan's jaws and allow Himself to be crushed as the payment for your sin. He came to you, not so that you could serve Him, but so that He could serve you and by serving you, bring you to the place that was intended for all men, the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord has prepared good works for us to, not so that we might be saved - He has already done that. But so that set free from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of self, you may freely love as you have been freely loved by Him and bestow His love and grace on others. The Lord Jesus in mercy looks upon you in your need and most certainly does not despise you. He comes to you. He protects you. He provides for you as His precious lamb. He doesn't count the cost or mark you as too lost, too broken, a waste of effort.

Dear Christian, one day your suffering will be over. One day there won't be sin or any of the terrible things that sin causes. One day you will be delivered from your suffering forever. You will be separated from all your enemies who hate you and seek to destroy you. One day, Satan will no longer be able to harass and torment you. Because one day, God grant that it be soon, Jesus will come in all His glory and splendor and separate

the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares and bring you into the eternal rest and joy of heaven. But until that day, He comes in humility to serve you, to comfort and assure you, to bind up your wounds and to feed you that you may safely pass through things temporal and finally reach the things eternal with the rest of of Christ's dear flock.

In the Name of +Jesus.