

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Nov 12th, 2017 – Matt. 25:31-46 – Second Sunday of End Time

About a month ago I was listening to an interview with a Lutheran pastor who has written a big three volume commentary on Matthew and the interviewer asks him about how he applies the message of Matthew to his life and he said, “Well, my mother is 94 and she has Alzheimer’s disease. And she’s in a memory care unit. And I was there visiting her yesterday and she needed my help just to eat a little bit of food. And she had a few French fries and some milk and not surprisingly she wanted some strawberry shortcake.” And he said, “I was tempted to regard that 45 minutes that I spent there with my mother as something of little importance. I love my mother but I’m a busy guy. I’ve got stuff to do.” But he said, “When I went to bed that night I thought to myself, Well I did one important thing today. I fed my mother some food.”

As I was thinking about that this week I thought to myself, “If that’s really true, that the most mundane things are actually the most important things, then I’ll never be bored ever again!” Now of course that’s hyperbole. Being bored is a part of life. It’s ok, even healthy, to be bored every once in a while. But I do think that Jesus today gives to us a way to find joy and fulfillment in our everyday tasks. He says, **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt 25:40)**

So for example, if you’re a parent, every time you change a diaper, every time you feed your child some food, every time you spend quality time playing with your child, Jesus considers that as something that was done for him. **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt 25:40)** Every time you go visit your elderly parents, and do something to help them. Jesus considers that as something that was done for him. **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Matt 25:40)**

And this extends outside our immediately family also to our church family. I remember when I was in high school, there was a little old lady who needed a ride to church every Sunday. And my dad would ask me to give her a ride. I had to get up extra early to give her a ride and you can imagine that as a high schooler I didn’t want to get up extra early for anything. And so when my dad would wake me up on Sunday morning I would groan and I wouldn’t show the best attitude about it, but as I was going out the door my dad would yell out after me, “Jesus appreciates it!” Jesus appreciates it when you help other people.

And this extends also to anyone who is poor and needy. Jesus says, **“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.” (Matt 25:35)** Jesus obviously cares a lot about helping the poor and needy. Jesus talks about it all the time. And so we followers of Jesus should help the poor and needy. That might be by sending in an offering to WELS Kingdom Workers or WELS Christian Aid and Relief or it might be by making some food for the meal we host at Love Inc. the first Friday of every month. Jesus cares about the poor and needy and so he wants us to help the poor and needy.

And this extends even to strangers, **“I was a stranger and you invited me in” (Matthew 25:35)**. We have people in our congregation who have hosted or are hosting international students. They will be publically thanked by Jesus on the Last Day and they will be given the kingdom of heaven.

“I was sick and you looked after me” (Matt 25:36). When you care for your sick child or go and visit a fellow church member in the hospital, Jesus considers that as something that is done for him.

Everyday life is just filled with ways in which you can serve Jesus by serving your neighbor. And not only is serving your neighbor a joyful and fulfilling way of life, it’s one of only two possible ways that you can live life. You either serve Jesus by serving your neighbor or you live to serve yourself. And this passage makes it clear that if you live to serve yourself, that way of life will be ultimately unfulfilling in this life and it will be eternally unfulfilling in hell. **“He will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes**

and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me” (Matt 25:41-43).

Notice that Jesus does not mention anything actively evil. He doesn't say, "You are murders. You robbed a bank." No, He sends them to hell for something they didn't do. This is called a sin of omission. They omitted something. **"I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat."** Jesus talked about sins of omission when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. You know the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man was robbed and beaten and left half dead on the side of the road. And a priest and a Levite walked by on the other side and did not help their neighbor in his time of need. They committed a sin of omission.

You wouldn't have to look very far in my life to find sins of omission. Maybe the same is true for you. That's why it's important that we cling in faith to the verses right after our lesson, **"When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 'You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.'" (Matt 26:1-2)** Jesus was crucified to save us also from our sins of omission. Jesus hung on the cross to forgive us not only for things we've done but for the things that we didn't do.

And we're so thankful to Jesus for forgiving us that we serve Him by serving our neighbor. You see true faith will always produce good works. You might have wondered about that when you heard the lesson for today and you heard Jesus point to the people's good works on Judgment Day: **"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat ..."** (Matt 25:34-35) Why is Jesus pointing to their good works? I thought we were saved by faith and not by works!

Yes, we are saved by faith and not by works. The Bible says that. In Romans 3:28 it says, "A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." Eph 2:8-9 says, "By grace you have been saved through faith, not by works." Yes we are saved by faith and not by works. But once you are saved by faith, faith will always produce good works. And so good works are the evidence that faith is there. Good works are like the footprint of faith. And so on the Last Day Jesus will point to our good works done for Jesus as evidence that we have faith in Jesus. Martin Luther himself said, **"Faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. It is impossible for faith not to be doing good works incessantly. Faith does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever."**

Since God helped us in our need by sending Jesus to save us. We want to help our neighbor in his need, whatever that need might be. John Chrysostom was a Christian preacher in the 300s AD and he pointed out that Jesus isn't asking us to do anything heroic here. He doesn't say, "I was sick and you healed me." Jesus just says, "I was sick and you looked after me." Jesus isn't asking us to do anything heroic. He's just asking us to notice our neighbor's need and help him. And just going about your everyday life will present you with plenty of opportunities to help your neighbor in his need.

The most wonderful thing that Martin Luther brought back to the church was the clear teaching of justification by faith. But the second most wonderful thing that Martin Luther brought back to the church was called the doctrine of vocation. The doctrine of vocation is that you serve Jesus by doing your everyday tasks, because when you do your everyday tasks, that's how God takes care of other people. So for example, if you're a parent, then you serve Jesus by changing your baby's diaper and feeding your baby and putting your baby's clothes on. And that is service to Jesus because you are how Jesus takes care of your baby. Think about that! You a way that Jesus takes care of your baby! Whatever your daily vocation is, it gives blessings to other people. And if you are a channel by which Jesus gives blessings to other people, then how can you be bored ever again? Go and find great joy in serving Jesus by serving other people. Amen.