

Judgment for the Half-Breed

Matthew 25:31-46

When you think of Jesus, what image of him comes to mind? If you're like me, you think of him welcoming the children, healing the sick, preaching and teaching. There are images of Jesus being our shepherd and, of course, we think of the cross and his great sacrifice on our behalf. But then along comes this passage from Matthew and it pricks our consciences, because it demands that we also think of Jesus as judge. We honestly don't do that very often. But – we need to face up to the fact that we can't just make of Jesus what we want. In other words, he is what he is. Our Redeemer, the one to whom we are accountable, is also our Judge.

There are some clear messages that come out of this passage. First, Jesus condemns the sins of omission, that is, not doing anything, much more than he does the sins of commission, doing something wrong. Second, and the corollary to the first, Jesus' judgment of us is based on our treatment of others, good and otherwise. Third, the righteous are unaware they have encountered the Christ in their reaching out to others. The lesson for us is that righteous behavior is not done for the sake of the reward it brings.

I want you to think about yourself for a moment. What kind of person are you? To put it to you directly, when Judgment Day comes, will you be a sheep or a goat? We all want and pray we will be among the sheep, do we not? I have to tell you though, that if Judgment Day is anything at all like what Jesus says it is going to be, then I am afraid I am going to cause my Lord some problems. Mind you, I don't want to be a problem. It's just that I don't fit neatly into either one of the two categories Jesus talks about here. When the Son of Man comes in all his glory, he is going to look at me and say, "What am I to do with you? Explain yourself." I will quickly answer, Lord, sometimes I fed the hungry. There were days when I clothed the naked and many times I visited the sick." And the King will reply, "That's mighty sheepish of you, I must say."

"But, Lord.....wait.....that's not all," I will reluctantly add, because I know there are no secrets from God. "Lord, there were other days." I gulp hard. "There were those days when I stuffed myself while others starved. There were nights when I warmed myself by the fire while others shivered in the cold. And there were times when I didn't want to deal with those looking for help and I averted my eyes as I quickly passed by them." When I am done the King will look at me and say, "That is a problem. What am I to do with you?"

If Judgment Day is anything like what Jesus says it will be, then I am afraid I am going to cause my Lord some trouble. For I am not one-hundred percent sheep. But neither am I one-hundred percent goat. I am a half-breed, fit neither for the left nor right hand of God. Am I striking a responsive chord here? While each of us likes to think we are a sheep through-and-through, is not the reality that we are half-breeds?

Thornton Wilder wrote a marvelous book entitled *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. In the story, Brother Juniper held the belief that God punished evil people but rewarded the good. It was the same belief the Jews of Jesus' time held. Brother Juniper's problem was he could not prove his hypothesis. All he needed was the right set of circumstances to convince his doubters. He thought he had found it when the century-old bridge that spanned the San Luis Rey collapsed killing five people. Brother Juniper spent the next six years collecting evidence about each of the five people who had died to make his case. He theorized that since all had died suddenly and tragically, that each was inherently evil and God had punished them. Even if you haven't read Wilder's book you can guess what happened. Every scrap of information Brother Juniper uncovered established that each of the five people killed on the bridge was a mixture of saint and sinner. Each was both a sheep and a goat, a half-breed.

I don't find that surprising, because that is the way it is with me, and I suspect also with you. There is inside of me two selves. I have an impatient self that can cut people off. I have an angry self that at times can set my blood boiling and I hurt people's feelings with my angry words. I have an indifferent

self that doesn't want to deal with people and their problems, because I have enough to do to take care of myself. But living right alongside that occasional wretch within me is also a loving self, capable of compassion that sometimes even surprises me. I have an involved self that cries for the world's oppressed, a self that feels righteously indignant when a child is harmed, or a race maligned, or the earth ravaged.

Can you see the problem Christ is going to have with me on Judgment Day? Is he going to have trouble with you also? I am a hodgepodge of holy and unholy motives, a blend of pure and impure thoughts, a jigsaw puzzle of selfish and unselfish deeds. What is the Lord going to do with a half-breed like me on that day when he separates the sheep from the goats? What is he going to do with me?

Here is what I believe. I think it will be both. I think you and I will go through hell on that day. The Shepherd loves his sheep so very much and he has wept throughout all eternity over the ones who starved and froze and lay sick with no one to care. On the Day of Judgment, the King will show all of them to us and say through his tears, "Those were my children." And all the regret and pain that *God* has felt down through the ages *we* will feel. As in a passing parade, we will see and hear and touch and feel and smell all those we should have helped and did not, because we deemed it not wise, nor practical, nor in our best interest, nor worth our effort. All of us will have to stand and take our medicine and know deep down in the core of our very being that we were goats far more often than we believed we were, or that we should have been. And if that isn't hell, then I don't know what is, and I don't look forward to that bitter dose.

But listen to me well. After the hell that must be paid to the God we have grieved, and while you and I are lying there in the dust weeping at the shame of it all, I believe there will come a word, a quiet and grace filled word that we scarcely deserve. This incredible King will look at us and say, "I tell you the truth – you who had full cupboards are the truly hungry; I will feed you. You who are dressed so well are the truly naked; I will clothe you. You who enjoyed such excessive access to all the fine things of life are the truly imprisoned; I will set you free."

And miracle of miracles, Christ will lift us up from the dust and give us back our very lives. That, my friends, is what I believe it means to be judged on the basis of our deeds, but sentenced on the basis of God's grace. That is what I think happens to half-breeds on Judgment Day. In fact, that is what happens to us every day when we honestly confess our sins. God will remind us of the time we turned the television channel rather than look at the face of the starving child. God will show us the faces of the future generations who will have less because of our robbery of the earth's resources. If we take our confessions seriously, God will give us hell. But that is the only way God has of giving our lives back to us. Because only then will the good news sound really good – when Jesus' voice comes and says, "I love you still. Now go – and do what you did not do yesterday. For I am hungry and naked and imprisoned and a stranger....." Amen? Amen!

- Pastor Richmond B. Stoakes, Carbondale Community United Methodist Church, 20 November 2011
[Christ the King Sunday]