

“A Promise to Believe”

Text: Matthew 25:31-46

Some time ago I read devotion in Today's Light that focused on one of my favorite chapters of the Bible, Hebrews 11. The chapter chronicles the lives of the Old Testament saints and their struggles and triumphs. Mostly it speaks of their faith.

A recurring phrase, which occurs throughout the chapter, is belief in God's promise of deliverance and the sending of the Messiah. The chapter concludes by saying: “And all these, though commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”(Hebrews 11:39-40) The author of the devotion pointed the concluding part of the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. As the movie concludes, his dying father tells Indiana Jones that there is a bridge across the chasm he is approaching, even though he cannot see it. He does just that and walks to safety.

Trust in the promise. Our text gives us a picture of Judgment Day. When Jesus returns, he will judge the world. It will be by his word and believing that word has everything to do with our life after death. Others and we misleading at best. The promise of Jesus, his return and our salvation is-

A PROMISE TO BELIEVE

- I. Jesus is returning soon**
- II. He will accept you**
- III. You can live faithfully**

I.

A. In chapters 25 and 26 of St. Matthew's gospel we have material that speaks of the end of the world. The message is one we often bring on the concluding Sundays of the Church year. This also is the thrust of the beginning of the Church year in Advent. From all the gloom and doom of the world today, this is a message that is most fitting, for it speaks to the Biblical truth of all these threats with God's promises.

The first thing we realize in our text is that it is Jesus himself that is the center of the scene. He is returning again, something talked about more than anything else in the New Testament did. He is returning as judge, but also to bring salvation to you. Scripture tells us: "So Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."(Hebrews 9:28) On the other hand, for the unbeliever it will be a dreadful day, for the attempts and deeds will fall far short of our Savior's expectations.

B. It is Judgment Day and Jesus is separating the sheep and the goats. These are symbolic of believers and unbelievers. A quick reading of this text gives one the impression that this determination is made upon the actions of people. This is not the truth totally, as we shall see. If this were true, we would be able to earn our salvation, which runs contrary to the message of the Scriptures.

The first thing Jesus says is, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take the inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." This has to do with your election. As a believer in Jesus, you can be sure that from eternity God has elected you as his very own. Now Jesus tells of the works of the believers. Note also that the believers do not remember doing these things for Jesus. That is because the good works we do come out of our faith. You see, we really don't have to think about them. We don't keep a tally sheet of the good we do. As soon as we do that, we fail to believe the promise. Our salvation is a

free gift from God through his son our Savior Jesus Christ. As he appears in the judgment scene, he announces this is true.

II.

A. The first news that he announces is his acceptance of the righteous. What does it mean to be righteous? The world has several definitions. It usually has to deal with being good or even perfect. What does Jesus mean by this term? The book of Genesis says: “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited to him as righteousness.”(Genesis 15:6) The prophet Jeremiah spoke of Jesus when he said: “This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD our righteousness.”(Jeremiah 23:6). St. Paul in his letter to the Romans says: “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”(Romans 1:17)

The righteous are you and I! Jesus does not list all the things that we have done in order to become that way. His announcement says that we are already that way. The various good works that we have done: Gave food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, visited those who were sick or in prison and welcomed the stranger, were done with no thought for reward and in the name of Christ. He says those comforting words to you and me: “take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” We are chosen by him and accepted by God’s grace.

B.1. We know this grace of God through the forgiveness of our sins. If it is true that we cannot earn heaven by the good things we do, it follows that God does not forgive our sins for that reason either. We cannot make up for our rebellion against God by covering up our sins with supposed good actions. God knows what we are like. The Apostle Paul writes: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”(Romans 6:23)

2. This is the reason for our good works. We don’t do them to earn

God's favor, but instead out of thanks to him. Someone has said of our good works, "God doesn't need them, we don't need them, so they are given to our neighbor." What a comfort that is for you, and also what an opportunity! You don't have to worry whether you've been good enough. If it were left up to good works, that is the way it would be, there would always be uncertainty. You have the assurance that you are accepted by your Savior and are freed to serve others.

III.

A. It is interesting to contrast the answers to both groups of people. They really sound much the same. The righteous were not aware of doing good for Jesus, those who were not were unaware as well. The righteous naturally, as a fruit of faith, did deeds of kindness. The unrighteous didn't see the opportunity at all because they were not looking through the eyes of faith.

This is a reminder to all of us that we should be making good use of our time until the Lord returns. There are many on the left, the goats, the unrighteous, who can be brought into God's kingdom through our words and witness. How can we make best use of our time as we work in God's kingdom?

B.1. Jesus in chapter 24 of this gospel says, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." (Matthew 24:13) When we see great disasters where great loss of life occurs are we concerned? Deaths during recent earthquakes would wipe out entire populations of this country. That might cause some concern here, but what if it is someplace far removed from us. Do all the stories of death and destruction make us lose compassion and sympathy?

2. As we know the love of our Savior, we can show it to others as well. In our opportunities, living in the promise, through faith, we can see Jesus in others. Eternal life is ours. We do not do good works to get to heaven. We do good works because we are going there. We live with that assurance from God's promise to us in Christ. Amen.

