

McCabe United Methodist Church  
February 7, 2010  
"Sheep and Goats"  
**Matthew 25:31-45**  
by Pastor Gary Walters

Today's scripture lesson comes from Matthew 25, and I will start at verse 31.

“When the son of man comes in his glory with all his angels he will sit on his royal throne and the people of all nations will be brought before them and he will separate them as a shepherd separates their sheep from the goats and he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right ‘My father has blessed you, come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created for when I was hungry you gave me something to eat and when I was thirsty you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me and when I was naked you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick you took care of me and when I was in jail you visited me.’ Then, the ones who pleased the lord will ask, ‘When did we give you something to eat or drink, when did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail.’ And the king will answer them, ‘Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.’”

The word of God, for the people of God, thanks be to God!

The testimonies that our three ladies from the Haiti Solar Oven Project have shared with us are a vivid illustration of this passage so I'm not going to add a lot to what Karen, Kathy and Lillian have just shared, but I would like to briefly bring out a couple of points from this scripture passage and then give an invitation. So what strikes me as I read this passage is that those who had served Christ were surprised, they were surprised that they had been serving God. They simply knew that they were merely meeting human need. It wasn't some conscious effort to fulfill a religious obligation, it wasn't “look at what we're doing for God.” On the contrary, it was simply a part of who they were and how they lived and how they approached their fellow human beings.

It reminds me of a story about a monastery that was in tough shape. At the monastery things were shabby, the meals were less than desirable because they didn't have enough food, because the monks doing the work were halfhearted and lackluster at best in fulfilling their duties and their daily chores. It wasn't just the food and the cleaning, but just everywhere in terms of attending to their duties. One day a wizened old monk was passing through and was given hospitality at this monastery. The leader of the monastery that hosted this aged old monk asked him as he was leaving if he had any advice on how to deal with the issues that were before them. The old monk looked at him and he said "Oh, I didn't notice anything wrong. In fact I saw Christ among your number." Well the leader of the monastery was shocked, how could it be that Christ was actually dwelling among them. Well this was very exciting news for the leader and so he passed this word on to a couple of the other leaders within the monastery and in turn they told some others and a couple others and that whisper ran through the brotherhood that Christ was actually among them. That Christ was one of their numbers.

Well, this worked an interesting magic among those brothers for if Christ was one of them and what they did in terms of their chores and their duties wasn't just serving Frank or Henry, but was serving Jesus, well that was a very different matter and so they set themselves to it with a whole different heart. It was a radical transformation.

About a year after this wizened old monk had first come through, and after this news had worked its transformation among the brothers, this aged old monk came through again and was hosted at the monastery. The leader took him aside and pressed him and said "Brother, who is Christ among us." And the wizened old monk looked at him and he said "The answer is here." And out of his knapsack he pulled this leather bound flat object. It looked like it might have been a book, he wasn't quite sure. Well the leader was just shaking with anticipation as he grabbed hold of this book and as he opened it up it was a mirror. He looked at that mirror and he looked at this aged old monk and he said "I don't understand." The aged old monk in his wisdom responded, "Christ is in you. It is in each of you and as you serve each other you serve Christ."

Well, not too surprising of a punch line on that story but it does drive home

the point that as we serve one another and especially as we serve those that we consider least and last and lost, those that we look at and they might even be a little bit scary and we would rather sometimes not serve them or engage them, that in fact it is there that we most clearly serve Christ.

But this whole idea, these sheep were surprised that they had been serving God. That it had simply become a part of who they are. I don't think that happens naturally. I think it is something we need to focus some attention on so that we cultivate in our hearts, in our lifestyles, the habits that make that kind of radical hospitality, that kind of extravagant hospitality, that radical generosity simply a part of who we are so that what we do and how we live becomes a reflection of Christ, so that indeed we as individuals and we as a church become Christ's hands and Christ's feet as he serves the world.

The irony of course is that as we do that we are also serving Christ, not only being Christ but serving Christ. It's a mystery, but here's the invitation. At the end of February, February 26 and 27, we want to take a group to the Haiti Solar Oven Project, just outside of Brookings, South Dakota. They can only take 8 or 10 but we would like to fill up a couple of vehicles to go help Rick Jost make the kits, put together the kits so that the Haitians can make these solar ovens which helps to answer their need in so many ways. There is another group that we would like to take in April.

But if the Solar Oven Project isn't your thing, consider the many ways that McCabe is serving or that you could serve even just out in the community. Open Door is always in need of volunteers, I think there is a note in your bulletin. There is the banquet, but that is only once a year. I think we really need to give our time and our talents more often than that; although that is an important part and a place where you can serve. Kits and putting together health kits and flood buckets and all the other types of kits that we Methodists make, I think just getting in the habit of doing those, would be a great step in cultivating a heart and an attitude of this radical generosity, of this extravagant hospitality. McCabe is starting an after school program. On Tuesday's we need volunteers to help us with these kids that will be coming over from Will Moore School. Higher need kids and kids that might not be the easiest to get along with, but kids who will be coming here to receive a snack and some Bible stories and some games and some help with

their homework, because, if they go home there is probably no one there. While this year it is on Tuesdays, come fall next year where we hope to be doing that four days a week and if we need volunteers now, we are really going to need the help them. Think of the opportunity though, to impact these kids. Think of the opportunity to serve these people down at the banquet. Think of the opportunity to touch the families that are involved in the Open Door. Think of the opportunity to be Christ for these Haitian families that will receive solar ovens. Think of the opportunities that you have to serve Christ in the world. The challenge is to be deliberate about cultivating in your heart, about giving your time, and about using your resources to be the body of Christ.

Would you pray with me? Lord, we thank you that so many others took up this challenge to be Christ and that they have been Christ for us. So, Lord, help us to do likewise. Put your words upon our lips, put your love in our hands and put your passion into our feet so that all that we are and all that we do and all that we strive to become is a reflection of your radical hospitality and extravagant generosity to a world that desperately needs both. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.