Second Last Sunday of the Church Year—November 18, 2026

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

God teaches you three things in this reading today. There is a final judgement, this is the first thing. The second is that not all people enter eternal life. The third is God tells you where you fit into all this and what your judgement is already and will be proclaimed on the Last Day.

Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

The Son of Man is none other than Jesus. This is a Messianic title used throughout the Scriptures with one example in the Old Testament reading from Daniel 7 today. The Son of Man doesn't refer to his human nature alone but the totality of his person and work as God's anointed one. The people in the Gospels, however, wanted a Messiah of a different stripe, a more political and earthly one. They wanted redemption from oppression and one to rule them as an independent people.

God, though, has eternity in mind even as he has no beginning and end and the Son of Man possesses all authority. The Son has the dominion and authority and a Kingdom given to him. The eternal Son of Man came into his creation. He took on human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He lived in perfect obedience to the Father and the law of God. He performed miracles, taught, and preached which all testified to who he is as eternal Son and bringing his Kingdom near to his own. His death atoned for the sin of the world and he stood under the Father's judgement and punishment for sin as he took the place of sinners and bore the sin of the world upon himself. His death paid the price on behalf of others and by his wounds there is healing. His resurrection from the dead confirmed and proclaimed that what he had done was accepted by the Father and who he is as God himself. His ascension to the right hand of the Father is where he now rules and reigns as King even as he is still with his own and gives out salvation through the means of grace.

When Jesus says he will return, then, he does so with full authority as the Lord himself. The notion of judgement automatically presupposes two things; there is a standard for the judgement and pronouncement of this by a judge. There's no way to get around this as try as people might. There is accountability to God and he renders judgment. You know this judgment now and to try and deflect or defer this judgement is not only unbiblical but puts yourself into the judgement seat that belongs to Christ.

When you want to assert that you stand outside of or above judgment, you're not only kidding yourself, but it's also intellectually dishonest. Everywhere you turn there is a judgment being rendered and certain standards and realities in which you live. The world operates with laws and is ordered in such a way as to place things upon you which are outside of your control. You might not like a certain law, but it doesn't matter one iota what you think when you stand before a judge. This goes, though, even beyond civil codes but there's natural law you are subjected to as well which is reflected in the civil. Take for example something related to this natural order; pro-creation. In order for there to be new life there need to be a man and woman. Even when people try to circumvent the process or think they can manipulate it, at the end of the day male and female, and what each contributes, create life. The same principles could be applied as you think about sustaining life as no one person on his own by his own can survive without something from outside his person even at the base level of food and water.

The sinful heart and mind though think man is self-governing or dictates his own standards by which he can live. The devil tempts you to think you answer to no one but your own self so be true to what you want. Yet in what is a divine

comedic irony even the mantra which tries to deflect the judgement of God's law here and now of "only God can judge me" proclaims the truth of what is to come. Jesus comes again and he comes to judge the living and the dead.

You'd think, then, that would stir everyone into taking this seriously. The Collect of the Day prays that God's people would take this seriously and stir up holy living. Listen to Jesus and know that you will be judged. Also be on guard for those who would try to tear you away from Christ and follow the path of condemnation and mock God. These are the scoffers mentioned in the Epistle reading.

The second thing your Lord teaches you today is that not all enter eternal life. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." Your Lord, Jesus, exhorts you to pay attention. He tells you exactly what will happen. He separates people.

There's a difference between the sheep and the goats. The question you ask yourselves, then, is "what is going on and what is the difference?" Well, Jesus tells you. Just as his coming judgment is not hidden, he tells you he's coming again, it's not hidden why the sheep enter eternal joy and the goats into eternal condemnation. The sheep served Christ, but the goats did not. The sheep are commended for their good works; the goats are condemned for their failure. That's the plain sense of the text. It's what God's word says.

Confronted with this fact that works seem to be what jumps out as the difference, we're left scratching our heads and placed into a corner with no escape. The law of God has a way of doing that, doesn't it? Every mouth and tongue are stopped. Yet we see, like so many things in theology, we don't view passages like this in isolation rather we take them into account in view of and with the whole counsel of God. That's when things get clearer, "Scripture interprets Scripture."

Looking closer we read other passages of the Scriptures with this one in Matthew. What does God's word say? We all know the passages well, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, lest no man should boast." Again, it is written, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In Romans 3 it is written, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." The list goes on; there's no shortage of these passages and there is no doubt what God teaches on this matter. Salvation is a gift received through faith, and this is delivered through the means of grace. Romans 1:17, which quotes from the Old Testament Prophet Habakkuk, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" The righteous don't live by their works, they live by faith.

This is what the Scriptures teach and what Scripture also teaches is something else. In John 15:5 Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Colossians 3 says, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality." Romans 2 also teaches, "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." There are many other passages that say these things as well. It's is with these passages, and the others, that the Athanasian Creed ends with the confession, "At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire. This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved."

So, we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone? Absolutely. So, God rewards us for our good works? Yes, he does. Both of those statements are true because the Bible teaches both of those things. Jesus commended those on his right for their works, but what didn't he bring up? Well, let's listen to the rest of the reading. "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Jesus doesn't hold the sin of the sheep against them and only recognizes their works. In Romans 4 God says, "David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'" The sheep are covered in something; it's the righteousness of their Shepherd. They are called as such in the text as well, they are the righteous. Their lives are lived by faith and the works they do come as fruit from the vine to whom they are attached as the branches. Notice too that the sheep weren't trusting in their works. They seem surprised by what Jesus says because they knew their sin and it was not on their radar to look to those things they were doing.

The goats, however, stand condemned in their sin. Their lives are lived apart from faith. Their response to Jesus and the question they ask of Jesus is a tell-tale sign as well, "'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'" They wanted to live their lives with the expectation they could be in control and do something for Jesus had they known this was the case. Rather than a fruit of faith, they saw their works as the root and tree of their faith in which they trusted as their foundation. When confronted with their sin, too, their response is not to confess it but to try and justify themselves. They think they are the victim who didn't know they were to do these works and serve Jesus. They want to be the judge of their actions and not be subject to Jesus.

Dear people of God. Hear this all today and know what your Lord says in this word before you. Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead and on in his judgment he divides people. When is this day? You don't know when, but you do know the day is surely drawing near. Look at your sin and your life and repent. When you persist in sin, you are rejecting the Lord's forgiveness and want Jesus to judge you by it. You are not living in faith but living a life outside the Kingdom of God. The blood of Christ covers your sin and puts it on to him who has paid the price for it, but when you want to persist and cling to your sin you are clinging to the very thing which will condemn you. Repent.

When faith is confronted by sin it confesses it and repents. It doesn't try to make excuses in your life but answers God's judgment with "You are right Lord, I have sinned. Lord, have mercy." Take this seriously and see the future in this Gospel reading. Judgement is coming and God separates the sheep from the goats. But here's the thing as you sit here right now, you know what God will say to you. This word keeps you and guards you in the faith which is why is so eternally deadly to stop hearing what Jesus says now. Sheep hear and follow their shepherd; it's not complicated.

The third is God tells you where you fit into all this and what your judgement is already and will be proclaimed on the Last Day. What is that judgment you will hear on that day? This is where you have a great comfort. Look and listen dear saints of God. You are sitting in this place with a baptismal font in front of you which reminds you of what God has done for you in your baptism; your sin was forgiven, you were rescued from death and the devil, and given eternal salvation. What will you hear when you stand before Jesus? ""Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" How do you know this? Well, you've already heard it and will keep hearing this morning. "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." You will taste what God will say to you as you take into your mouths the Body and Blood of Christ given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. You know what God will say to you because he is already saying it and giving it.

Your life is hidden in Christ as you have been crucified with him. You are righteous before God's throne because of Christ. His righteousness is counted to you through faith. See your life differently then as one who has been saved by grace through faith and has been prepared by God to good works for your neighbor. And yes, dear Christians, God will reward you and say "well done, good and faithful servant" to you on that day of judgment because he doesn't look at your sin. Covered with Christ all he sees is his righteousness. Your works in this life then are the beautiful and luscious fruit he produces through his word. You are who you are in Christ and listen to his commandments and desire what he commands. Let his word be a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Let his word show you the way through this life which is a life lived in faith toward him and in love toward your neighbor. Put away all that is false and put on the new life you have been given in your baptism.

Dear Christians, dear sheep, look to and don't fear the future judgment because it's preached to you now. "The Day Is Surely Drawing Near" and what a glorious day for you it will be. You will inherit what has been won for you even as you have salvation now. God says to you now, this very day, "Your sin is forgiven. You are baptized into Christ. Here is my body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. You have eternal life because here is Christ and what he has done, it's yours.

What a wonderful reading this is about the sheep and the goats. Christ crucified and risen for you is your confidence to face the day of judgment and the reason why the sheep, you, have eternal life. The comfort of the Gospel is the comfort of knowing your judgment. Look forward to the final day when the Lord doesn't look at your sin but says to you, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'"

O Jesus Christ, do not delay,
    But hasten our salvation;
We often tremble on our way
    In fear and tribulation.
O hear and grant our fervent plea:
Come, mighty judge, and set us free
    From death and ev'ry evil.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.