



Christ Lutheran Church

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Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Who’s Who and What’s What?” Matt. 25:31-46

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Dear family in Christ,

Who is who and what’s what? This is the conclusion of the people in the parable. At the end of it all, we didn’t see the people that we thought we saw. And when did we see Jesus? When did we see people who were in need? Who is who in our lives now? And even further we can ask what things do and did we give again?

If it were as simple as giving food, clothes, welcoming people in and visiting the sick and in prison, why don’t we hop up and take care of business? I venture to say that it is not as simple as that. I venture to say that this list of things to do is not an all-inclusive list.

Jesus seems to be more concerned with his periodic appearances on earth. Imagine this. Periodically Jesus becomes incarnate and walks the earth again. He disguises himself as a real person and secretly walks the earth and experiments to see if people will help him or not.

For the sake of Jesus teaching this seems to be how we are to imagine life. Anyone could be Jesus, we just don't know if any particular person we come in contact with will be the actual Jesus or not.

I've seen these kinds of experiments before. They are videos with a staged person in need, and then some are caught on camera doing something good, and some are caught doing nothing.

One such test was done where a child was placed at a bus stop in Oslo on a cold day with no jacket. Many people acted with compassion for the boy by offering him their own coat or scarf. Some did nothing, but in the end the boy was taken care of. The conclusion of the test is often there is good inside all of us. But how can we really know, unless it was a real need. These experiments don't actually put people in need or leave them in need otherwise that would be one cruel experiment!

As we come to this story in the Bible we are no doubt coming in confession. We have not fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed people in, and visited those who are sick and in prison. We may even be able to think of specific instances where we failed.

But today as we confess our sins to God we confess the things that we are not aware of. We confess sins that we don't know about. We confess sins we didn't realize we have done.

In the catechism it suggests that we confess our sins before the Pastor that we know about and that trouble our hearts. But before God we confess sins known and unknown. We confess all sins to God, and we pray God forgive us for the things we have no idea we have done.

And as we confess our sins, we can be sure of God's forgiveness. If we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse of all unrighteousness. This promise holds true even though we literally can't think of the things we did wrong.

This is a great comfort, and after we realize this, it's time for the fun part. It's time for guess who? This game is where you ask questions to identify characteristics about another person till you narrow it down and guess who it is with a specific name. And we also can start guessing what. What will we do for each person? What will we give to each person? What is someone's actual need?

But with God we will never guess. We will never guess what he was up to on this earth. We might, as we welcome someone into our home be entertaining angels. Yes, if you invited someone into your home or into your life, you might never know who that person really is. That sounds exciting to me, to know that we could be interacting with heavenly beings and somehow even interacting with Jesus himself.

It's true, Jesus takes it so personally that he embodies that person we are helping. He is active in our lives both receiving what we have done and also working through us to accomplish his good and gracious will.

Every moment and every person could be a mysterious wonderful spiritual event. Can we live that way, never knowing whether one event and act of kindness is more significant than another? We have to. We have no choice. We can only wait to see at the end of time what we did for and to Jesus himself. We can only live this way thinking to ourselves maybe that was an angel. Maybe that was Jesus.

If you did any shopping on Black Friday or even thanksgiving itself you might find yourself wondering was it worth it? Did I just completely absorb myself in materialism, living my life isolating myself from my family and friends? Maybe you made a smart choice by staying home and not messing with the hassle in order to spend time on other relationships.

I confess, I was out shopping, you caught me. I mean literally there are many witnesses. Despite some of the wasted time I spent, I noticed many the small interactions I had with others. I could say Hi to my friends shopping and encourage them. I met several employees who were extra patient. I bumped into random strangers, most of which apologized to be for nothing they did.

Although I wasn't doing charity work, I had several opportunities to share just a little bit of the true spirit of Christmas. Patience, understanding, gentleness, all in the name of Jesus, as we know what Christmas is all about. I even had the opportunity to spend a whole hour with an employee that was trying to help me. And of those events could be considered a spiritual event. Why should I limit God to times when I give someone a piece of bread, new clothes, and visiting people who are sick. And maybe just as a bonus I will in fact be sharing those things through actual Christmas gifts.

And as we give and welcome and share things with others, what could be better than sharing God's Word. Share the good news of Jesus. Don't you think even Jesus would like hearing about himself and how much he means to us? We know peoples real needs of being given the food of God's Word, the clothes of his righteousness won for us on the cross, and the presence of his love for those sick and imprisoned by sin.

All people are beggars, including you and me. We are all beggars before God, even those of us who are rich. Jesus certainly had compassion on those who were sick and needy in his ministry. But he even cared for those who were rich. Zacheus and Nicodemus are prime

examples of how Jesus love does not discriminate. In Jesus kingdom, all people need to be cared for and shown God's love.

God stepping into our world does not only come to us in the people who are not Christians. Christians themselves are also included in those who need kindness and care. God calls us to give to all equally without showing favoritism. There is a whole lot of God extravagantly taking care of everybody. God's grace is already in places we can't even imagine. But let's keep imagining, let's keep helping others and wondering what if? And let's keep saying to ourselves, "Maybe Jesus will be in this moment, in this gift, and in this person." Amen