

# *Last Sunday of the* **CHURCH YEAR**



**(Proper 29)**

## **Collect of the Day**

Eternal God, merciful Father, You have appointed Your Son as judge of the living and the dead. Enable us to wait for the day of His return with our eyes fixed on the kingdom prepared for Your own from the foundation of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

Psalms 95:1-7a  
(antiphon v.7a)  
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24  
1 Corinthians 15:20-28  
Matthew 25:31-46

## **Hymns**

Hymn of the Day – 532 or 513  
Other Hymns – 510 (OT, G), 540  
(OT, E), 564 (E), 851 (G), 511

## **Prayers**

For all the people of God, that they may always be prepared for the Son of Man to return in glory by continually being kept safe and secure in the Lord's flock, where they are fed and nourished by His Word and Sacraments, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all who are scattered and gone astray, that by the power of the Holy Spirit they may be returned to the fold before Christ returns to judge the living and the dead, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all pastors in Christ, that they may remain ever faithful in proclaiming our death in Adam and our resurrection in Christ as we ever look forward to the resurrection of the dead, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all in authority, that even as the kingdoms of this world are passing away, they may be granted wisdom and protection as they carry out their duties, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the hungry, that they may be granted daily bread as they have need of it, and that the Lord's servants may be moved to provide for them, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For those who are imprisoned, that they may be granted those who are willing to visit them with the Gospel of peace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For the sick, [including \_\_\_\_\_,] that they may be granted healing in body and soul, and that they would be granted comforters to visit them in their affliction, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

For all the faithful departed, that we remember them with thankfulness and look forward to the day when we are reunited with them in the world to come, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

# SEASON AFTER PENTECOST SERMON

LAST SUNDAY OF THE CHURCH YEAR  
NOVEMBER 22 2020

**Sermon Text: Matthew 25:31-46**

*'THE Story'*

At the end of the church year the Church reminds her children of a fact that is ignored and ridiculed by unbelievers. She declares that a day is coming when all things will be destroyed by fire and that this world will be reduced to nothingness. The Day of Judgment will bring not only the disappearance of all we see, but also the revelation of all that is not seen. A day is coming when those who have suffered for the sake of Christ will be vindicated and receive the reward for their faith.

Now, every story that has ever ended with a man and a woman, the bride and bridegroom, heading off into the distance with the words, "And they all lived happily ever after" . . . finds its origin in this story. Here is the Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, gathering up His Bride, the Church and taking Her off to heaven where, "they all lived happily ever after."

The Lord Jesus tells us a story. He tells us THE story. Not Hollywood, not make believe, not fiction, not once upon a time; but "it came to pass" . . . a true story. The people listening would have know the first parts of the story, just as you do. There is a beginning where the main characters are introduced – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." And it was good, very good. There wasn't really much to tell – the man and the woman were living quiet and peaceful lives in the Garden of Eden. But that didn't last long. The story was about to take a sharp turn, a turn away from God, a turn towards sin and death. We've hardly started the third chapter of Genesis when God's perfect world is already getting messed up: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals... 'You will not surely die,' the serpent said to the woman, 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" What a temptation! To be like God. The serpent, Satan, set the trap. And Adam and Eve took the bait

and things haven't been the same since.

But the Lord God would not let His perfect creation be ruined by our sinful disobedience. He loves us too much for that, and so He promised to send us a Saviour from, amazingly, the Seed of the woman. Throughout the Old Testament the sinful descendants of Adam and Eve waited for the Saviour to come. They waited through the time of the patriarchs, of bondage in Egypt and the exodus, of the prophets and king, of the exile to Babylon and their return. And then, at the fullness of time; the heavenly Father's only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, "was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures; And ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

And now, we wait again . . . wait for that last part of the story, of the Creed: "From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead" – the sheep and the goats. That is what we have been hearing about, praying for, looking forward to, hoping for, and confessing in the Creed all these years.

And that brings us to the story Jesus tells us today. When we hear the story Jesus directs our focus on Him, for He is the main character. But His focus is on you, the Beloved, the Bride, the Wife, the Church. And do you know what? They do live happily ever after. That is the Lord's goal. That is what the Christian faith is all about . . . to get us to heaven, to be with the Lord, to sit at His banquet table – the never ending wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church. That is what THE story, His story, is all about. It's not about you working to bring about a better world here and now, but about the Lord Jesus bringing you out of this sinful, evil, dying world to a better place . . . both now and forever. And we can only know what heaven will be like by what will not be there – no sin, no disease, no death, no pain, no sorrow, no anger, no hatred, no suffering, no temptation, no hunger, no disappointment, no bitterness.

And this story, we should note, is not a parable. The parables of the past two weeks started with these words: "The kingdom of heaven will be like," or "It will be like a man going on a journey." What we hear today, however, begins like this: "When the Son of Man comes" – comes in all His glory and might to judge the living and the dead. And when He does so, all nations, all peoples, of all times and all places, will be gathered before Him and judges as He sits on His throne. Yes, a time is coming when everyone – from Adam to the very last person to be born before that day – will be brought before the Lord. No one will be missing.

All the scoffers, the mockers, the enemies of the cross will stand along with all the faithful before the King of kings and Lord of lords. And He will judge by separating all people into two groups – sheep and goats. There is no middle ground here, for you are either a sheep or a goat, one or the other. You are either saved or you are not, you will have either eternal life or eternal fire, heaven or hell.

Who are these sheep? Well, Jesus calls them the righteous ones, the ones blessed by His Father. They are the ones who knew their sin and trusted their Saviour to forgive them and save them. They are the ones who thankfully received the Word and Sacraments. They rejoiced in the fact that they were washed clean in the waters of Baptism, who heard and embraced the pure Gospel proclaimed to them, who received forgiveness of their sins in their partaking of the body and blood of Jesus. These are the ones placed on the right hand of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and who has said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life.”

The goats, however, are placed on Jesus’ left. They are on the left because they willfully and stubbornly refused the Good Shepherd’s gracious invitation: “Come now, let us reason together; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” They paid no attention to His call to them during their earthly life to repentance. They refused to follow the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for them.

And to the sheep on His right Jesus will then say: “Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.” The sheep, however, who trusted in Christ’s righteousness His works and not their own, are not even aware that they did any such good works. But the King answered: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Have you done any good works lately? What was so good about them? Think of what Jesus is saying here. Since the sheep will not know that they have done any good works . . . even though the Lord knows, how can they ever be assured of salvation based on good works? How can anyone ever know if they look at the supposed good things that they have done, instead of the good work that Christ has done for them?

And yet, that is exactly what the goats of the world do . . . or try to do. And as

a result, to the goats, Jesus, the righteous Judge, will say: “Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and did not look after Me.”

Now, interestingly, it is not so much what the goats have done but what they have not done that Jesus mentions. They did not feed or clothe or visit the Lord because they knew Him not. They stubbornly refused to hear and receive the fruits of His work. They rejected His offer of forgiveness; and, as a result, were not righteous when they stood before the Lord on the Last Day.

And that’s how THE story will end – when the Lord Jesus comes in all His glory and might to judge the living and the dead. And until the story ends, He continues to be the main character in this story of the salvation and redemption of His sinful fallen because He continues to make His Bride beautiful. He continues to pour His forgiveness, His righteousness, His holiness upon Her – yes, upon you and me . . . doing so through the waters of Holy Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper, in Confession and Absolution, and in the proclamation of His Word.

No, not stubborn old goats who think and believe whatever they want, who live anyway they so desire, but sheep who simply hear His voice and follow Him. And of whom our Lord and King, our Bridegroom and Saviour, will say when the story ends: “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” That is, “And they all lived happily ever after.” Amen.