

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: Open My Eyes, That I May See

Lesson: Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?' ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' ⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ 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 you did not look after me.' ⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' ⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' ⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, also known as Christ the King Sunday. Do you know what it means that today is Reign of Christ Sunday? It means today is the last Sunday of the current liturgical year. You might have heard terms like liturgical year, liturgical calendar, and lectionary before; although the expressions vary slightly, they all refer to the church calendar.

The church calendar is a bit different from the everyday calendar we use. We typically think of December 31st as the last day of the current year and January 1st as the first day of the new year. However, in the church calendar, Reign of Christ Sunday is always the last Sunday. The season of Advent always marks the first Sunday and the first season of the new church year.

Also, the Liturgical calendar consists of Year A, Year B, and Year C, in a continuous cycle. For example, the current liturgical calendar has been Year A, and today is the

last Sunday of Year A. Starting next week, the season of Advent begins, and the following Sunday is the first Sunday of liturgical calendar Year B.

Each church calendar includes the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and the season of Pentecost. The church calendar suggests scripture readings from the Old Testament, Gospel, New Testament, and Psalms for Christians to meditate on each week. Based on these readings, the direction of messages, prayers, and hymns is determined weekly. The lectionary helps balance our faith. I believe following the lectionary is a form of spiritual training. Some may think that the same seasons repeat every year. However, repetition is essential because we repeat things that are important.

Repetition helps balance our faith and our lives. Through repetition, we gradually engrave the meaning of these things in our hearts. Through repetition, the depth of our faith grows little by little. I once described our journey of faith as the process of confession and absolution. Through repeated confession and absolution, our journey of faith progresses toward holiness little by little. Through repetition, we gradually resemble Jesus.

Today is the concluding Sunday of one church calendar, and next week marks the beginning of a new church calendar. And as always, the church calendar starts with the season of Advent. Two significant keywords for the season of Advent are waiting and preparation—waiting for the Lord to come and preparing for the Lord to come.

Even though the season of Advent hasn't officially started yet, my family and I began preparing for it a bit early this year as we set up our Christmas tree. Particularly, my wife wanted to get the Christmas tree ready ahead of time. So, this past Wednesday, we visited a Christmas tree farm in Deer Park to explore which type of tree would suit our home. The farm was large, with a wide variety of trees, making it challenging for us to choose. Nevertheless, it was nice to go early before the place got crowded and have the chance to see various types of trees. On the very next day, we had a blessed Thanksgiving watching movies at home. Then, on Friday morning, we returned to the farm to purchase our tree.

The farm was bustling with people who came to buy trees. While sipping on warm apple cider, we explored which tree would be suitable for our home. When thinking about Christmas trees, we came across a Fraser fir with the classic shape we associate with Christmas trees and decided on it. Looking at the larger trees chosen by others, we briefly wondered if we had picked one that was too small. However, when we brought it home and put it on the tree stand, it surprisingly matched our home perfectly. So, I can say that I'm ready for Christmas!

Friends, the season of Advent starts next week. How are you all anticipating and preparing for this season? What is the state of your hearts and souls?

Over the past two weeks, we have reflected on two parables of Jesus. Let's briefly review the previous parables, as I mentioned that repetition is important. The first story was the parable of the ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. Five of them prepared enough oil to light their lamps while waiting, but the other five did not prepare enough oil. Their subtle difference had an absolute impact on their relationship with the bridegroom.

The second story was the parable of the talents. A master entrusted his three servants with talents according to their abilities—five talents, two talents, and one talent, respectively—before embarking on a journey. The servants who received five and two talents immediately put them to work, producing positive outcomes. However, the servant who received one talent was unsure of how to use it and, out of fear, buried it in the ground. Upon the master's return, he returned the talent as it was. Whether each servant used their talents or not had an absolute impact on their relationship with their master.

Friends, five of the ladies prepared enough oil, but the other five did not. Why did the ladies who prepared have enough oil? And why did the others not prepare enough oil? The servants who received five talents and two talents knew what to do even before receiving talents from their master; they were prepared. So, as soon as they received the talents, they started doing what they knew they should. However, the last servant did not.

How did the servants who received five talents and two talents know what to do when they received the talents? On the other hand, did the last servant not know what to do when he received the talent? What was the difference between them? What do you think their difference was?

I see the difference between being prepared and not being prepared, knowing what to do and not knowing what to do as a difference in thirstiness — whether there was a thirstiness to know or not. The ladies who prepared enough oil had a thirstiness in their hearts to know God more deeply, to experience God more deeply. Their thirstiness made them pray to God, seek His will, and rely on Him for everything. And God opened their eyes, or more precisely, God opened their spiritual eyes. God opened their eyes because they had a thirstiness to know Him more deeply. However, the ladies who did not prepare enough oil did not have such thirstiness. Therefore, they did not know what God wanted or who God was.

Likewise, the servants who received five talents and two talents had a thirstiness in their hearts to know God more deeply. This thirstiness prompted them to seek God's will and to prepare. On the other hand, the servant who received one talent lacked a thirstiness in his heart. He did not seek God's will, nor did he pray. He did not know who God was, and he did not wholeheartedly rely on God.

Friends, I want to ask if you have a thirstiness in your hearts. Do you want to know God more deeply? Do you desire to experience God more profoundly? Do you know who God is?

We need to continually pray for God to open our eyes, open our ears, and open our mouths. With a heart of readiness, we should earnestly seek to know God's will. We need to confess with our lips that Christ is our Lord and King before God, and at the same time, we must confess these things with our lives. If we profess to believe in God with our lips but our lives are heading in a direction contrary to our confession, we must seriously reflect on our journey of faith.

In today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew, God clearly says to us that the day will come. On that day, God will separate those who believe in Christ from those who do not, much like the separation of sheep and goats.

To be more specific, at that time, God will distinguish between believers and non-believers based on whether we provided food and water to the hungry stranger, welcomed the stranger, gave clothing when they needed it, cared for them when they were sick, and visited them when they were in prison.

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (40)

Friends, if, despite confessing with our lips that we believe in God, our lives do not care for and love the least among us, our lives are heading in a direction different from our confession. If, despite confessing with our lips that we believe in God, we do not love our neighbors, our lives are heading in a direction different from our confession.

Our lives are both a gift and a blessing from God, and at the same time, our lives are a period of waiting and preparation for the Lord. Starting next week, the season of Advent, a time to wait for and prepare for the coming of the Lord, will begin. I hope that during this period, we reflect on our lives and journey of faith and check whether our confession and life are aligned. I pray that as we yearn to know God more deeply, the Lord will open our spiritual eyes, ears, and mouths, and our faith will gradually deepen. Amen.