

Christ the King
November 23, 2008
Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Matthew 25:31-46

A former military Chaplain tells the following story:

“I knew a retiree friend that worked at a local antique shop. I ran into him at a local furniture store one day and he proceeded to tell me the secrets to separating the true antiques from the clever reproductions.

“He showed me a four drawer dresser and he challenged me to tell him whether it was real or fake. It was dark cherry red and it looked very old. I gazed over the workmanship and the ornate carving into the wood. I ran my hands over the finish and looked under the legs. I opened all the drawers and slid them out and examined them. I unscrewed the knobs and looked at the metal screws that connected them to the wood. After my thorough searching I could only conclude this was a genuine article.

“My buddy smiled and told me that the average consumer was accustomed to the look of modern machined furniture and often were fooled by their preconceived notions. A smooth finish was a dead giveaway that modern power tools were used. A shallow scratch showed the pale raw wood underneath. My friend told me that milk paint was used to coat antique furniture which would seep deep into the wood

for an enduring finish. A slight scratch would not reveal naked wood. The dresser drawers I examined were finished with a nice stain even to the backs. Old furniture makers never bothered to coat the areas that would not show. My friend had demonstrated to me that clever forgeries exist and to be on the watch for them. Later that week I went into another antique store and after applying my friend's techniques I found to my amazement that most of the 'antique furniture' was fraudulent."¹

+ + +

Today's Gospel reading is the very last section of Jesus' farewell talk with his disciples. He knows that soon he will be arrested and put to death. Because of this, Jesus had some things he needed to say to them, even if these things were hard for the disciples to hear.

And, this story is one that's hard for us to hear, too. We don't like to think about the judgment day. We don't like to think that we'll be judged by what we've done in our lives. But indeed, we will be judged by the fruit that our lives bear.

Jesus speaks to us in today's Gospel text about fraudulent children of God. In this vivid account of the last judgement the true children are called sheep and the frauds are called goats. The measure that God used to determine the difference was

their actions. The sheep clothed the naked, ministered to the sick, fed the hungry, visited those in prison and gave the homeless a place to stay.

The goats looked somewhat like sheep from a distance but when it came to doing the true acts of godliness they fell way short and were condemned. They spoke about great and lofty religious goals but never settled down to do the normal Christian acts that bless others. The true children of God were motivated by the spirit within to do those acts out of love and were amazed that God rewarded them in the end.

+ + +

I've now been with you as your pastor for a little over ten weeks. When I first met with the Council back in May to discuss the possibility of a call here at Abiding Peace, I was struck by the strong call to mission expressed by many of the Council members. I was impressed that, despite all the difficulties you've suffered over the past several years, this congregation still strives to work together to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe people, and care for the sick. It was this strong call to mission that I found your most attractive quality.

And, indeed, I haven't been proved wrong as I've gotten to know you better. If anything, I've come to realize an even deeper call to mission than I first suspected. Mission is done every day in this congregation. Mission is done when we

provide a warm, welcoming building for people in our community. A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to meet several members of the AA group that meets here on Wednesday night. That all expressed deep gratitude for our providing a meeting place for their group. Mission played out here in the last few days when the local Girl Scout district used our facilities to organize and distribute things for their latest fund-raiser.

Mission is done in this congregation through our food pantry. As you might well imagine, in our current tough economic times we are seeing an increasing number of people calling upon us to provide food to meet their basic needs. I am constantly amazed at the bounty that all you little church mice leave behind in our kitchen to be distributed to those in need.

Mission is done when we prepare food and serve that food at Faith Kitchen in Dover.

Mission is done when we collect clothing to distribute to those in need.

Mission is done when we care for each other, in times of illness or distress.

Mission is done when we welcome the stranger into our midst. Last Sunday you all provided a most warm welcome to the call committee here to observe Pastor Prashad lead us in worship and preach the Gospel. You have also provided a warm

welcome to the several visitors who have passed through our doors over the past couple of months.

Mission is done when we partake in fellowship & food ever week. It gives us a chance to re-connect with each other.

Mission is done when our seniors group meets every month for fellowship and Christian growth.

Mission is done in our Confirmation class, where we have the opportunity to help pass on the faith to the next generation of Christians.

Mission is done through our nursery, where we not only provide a wonderful atmosphere of Christian care-giving but also give the gift of worship to the children's parents.

Mission is done through our outreach at Mount Olive Manor, where over a hundred people have clean, affordable living. In the coming months, we'll have the opportunity to deepen our ties with Mount Olive Manor when we host the monthly birthday party and begin offering monthly Protestant worship services to the residents there.

Mission will be done when we commission and send our high-school age youth off to the Youth Gathering in New Orleans next July, where they will work in programs to increase literacy in that impoverished city.

Mission is done when we forward our tithes and offerings to the Synod and National church in order to be put to use for the good of the greater church.

Mission is done when we give offerings to ELCA Disaster Relief to assist those suffering from natural catastrophes.

+ + +

I know I've gone on for quite some time, but these are only *some* examples of how this congregation already lives out its mission every day. In all these ways, you have become the face of Jesus to those in need. Every time you serve a meal at faith kitchen, you're being the face of Jesus. Every time Christine or I give out bags of food from the church's food pantry, we're being the face of Jesus. Every time we extend a warm welcome to a stranger, we're being the face of Jesus. Each time we do one of the acts I've just described, we are representing Jesus to the world.

+ + +

It seems somehow fitting that this text occurs today, on this final day of our final stewardship campaign. We've spent four weeks looking at what it means to Take, Bless, Break and Give our offerings. We've heard the call to be 100% Bold in our giving, for the sake of God's mission in the world, and for the sake of the mission of our congregation here in Budd Lake.

All of your offerings here at Abiding Peace go toward the mission of the church. Your offerings are sometimes used in rather ordinary, mundane ways – things like making sure we have a building for our and the community's use, to heat and electricity, to paper to print our weekly worship bulletins on.

It is these rather ordinary things that make the mission work of each and every member possible. When our members gather for worship on Sunday mornings, we're being strengthened to go out and be the face of Jesus to the world. We receive encouragement to go out and be the counter-cultural community that Jesus calls us to be, serving those in need rather than living only for ourselves.

When I first met the congregation back in June, I encouraged you all to keep Jesus in the center of everything you do. I said that so long as we remain focused on Jesus in all that we do, God would bless and prosper our endeavors. I have seen you do this. And today, as we prepare to offer our financial pledges for the coming year, I hope that you've kept this in mind. We give not because God needs our giving, but because we thank God for what He has given us! We give not so that we might preserve a building and administrative structures in the congregation; we give so that these things might be useful tools as we continue doing our mission work in the world. We give because giving is just one of many ways that we trust God to provide all that we need. We give because there are still so many people in the

world who need to have an encounter with the living God that we all know, whether it be through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the spoken word, or through our actions in Christian charity.

So as we prepare to offer our financial pledges today, I would simply like to say, Thank you! Thank you for prayerfully considering how you can financially support the mission work of this congregation in the coming year. Thank you, for being the face of Jesus to those in need, through your generous support of the mission work of this congregation.

May you be as blessed in your giving, as those in need will be blessed in their receiving.

Amen.

<1,760 words>

¹ Edward Williamson on *Sermon Central*, http://www.sermoncentral.com/print_friendly_illustration.asp?illustration_id=29636 (downloaded 11/22/2008).