

*31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' 45 Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Every year for my birthday my mother made me the red cake. The red part of the red cake is really chocolate with four bottles of red food coloring added. The frosting is mostly butter, with sugar and I think, some milk. Though I may not have the recipe down pat, let me assure you I know how to eat the red cake.

First, I eat the cake part. Carefully I hollow out the bottom layer, the top layer of my piece. All along the edge I leave just the smallest, moist edge of red cake. Then comes the moment- devouring the frosting with just that little bit of cake.

For me, what the Bible teaches about the justification of the ungodly is like that frosting. God has given us a really wonderful piece of cake, layer upon layer with all the words and stories and teachings. But I like to clear away everything but what Paul writes about the grace of God in Jesus Christ and feast only on that.

This is the flavor: "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

I have sinned, I do sin. When the judgement day comes, I am counting on Jesus saying, "Lynn, through what I, Jesus, have done, you are saved. Not your works or your love

or anything that comes from you, Lynn, but my giving myself for you has prepared a place for you.”

The love of God in Jesus Christ - what a delicious word upon which to feast! But there is more to the cake.

“When the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

The feast God has prepared, I'm ready to taste it, but what is this, it is not my beloved frosting. For I wait to hear Jesus say, “I died for you, I gave my life for you,” but listen to what he says instead:

“Come you that 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 something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Now that is a different flavor altogether. Not a word about Jesus dying or our unworthiness. Rather the feast is of a people who love Jesus by loving the poor and the suffering, yet who never knew they did. They helped and gave and shared, simply because they cared - not a single thought of reward.

For years now, I've been trying to mix these two layers of the cake together. Taking the butter and the milk and the sugar and stirring them into the cake batter with the chocolate and the four bottles of red food coloring, popping it all in the oven. A mess.

That's what I get when I try to stir together this parable that Jesus told about the last judgement with Paul's words about Jesus dying for us. I get a mess. For in scripture God has given us layer upon layer, to be consumed by us, God's cake made just the way God prepared it for us.

So let us listen to this parable of Jesus, just the way it is told. Chew on it, taste it, see what sort of nourishment it is for you.

Where will we see Jesus? In every brother or sister we encounter who is in need. God did not give us a photograph of Jesus to treasure and admire. But if you will look around, you will see Jesus' face in a dirty face, a troubled face, or a burdened face - maybe a skeletal face - skin stretched over bone because of cancer, or because of hunger. Maybe the pigment of that face will not match your own.

One thing we know for sure, it is not the face that looks at us in the mirror. That is the face we love to worship and serve and to think looks just like Jesus. Not that face but certainly every face you'd never think would belong to Jesus, yes, every one of those faces is his. Her face is Jesus' face.

“As you did it for her, and him, you did it to me.”

And there is a layer in this cake that is bitter. Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me 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 nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you just 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.

If I were preparing the recipe, I think I'd leave that layer out.

But our loving Lord has put it into our mouths with all the rest, to be tasted, consumed for our nourishment.

Kind of makes us think.