

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.”

*From Luther’s Small Catechism: The Second Article.*

*Of Redemption.*

*And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

*What does this mean?--Answer.*

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

I remember a sign in a Shakey’s Pizza Parlor in Cedar Falls, Iowa. “We made a deal with the bank – we won’t cash checks and they won’t make pizza.” For Shakey’s in that era long before credit and debit cards it was a light-hearted way of saying, “Cash only.”

But I have remembered that sign all these years for it reminds me attention needs to be paid to the things that are closest to the purpose of a business. A restaurant that pays more attention to the pictures displayed on the walls than to the food that is served will not stay open long. Nor will a doctor more concerned about the reading material in the waiting room than diagnosing an illness.

This Lent we have been focusing on the Apostles’ Creed – a statement that clearly tells about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The past two weeks we have centered attention on Jesus giving his life on the

cross which is at the center of the creed. In the catechism after Luther tells about Jesus saving us through his death Luther teaches us to confess: “All this he has done that I might belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness just as he is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

Jesus died on the cross that you might belong to him.

Once upon a time I belonged to 4-H. I attended the meetings of the Milan Jets 4-H club – went to camp on Kelly’s Island, showed some lambs at the Erie County fair but my heart was not in it. On paper I belonged to 4-H did not own me.

Some of us belong to the church in that way – doing what is expected but the church of Jesus Christ does not own us. We belong but not really.

Jesus died so that we might belong to him and live under him in his kingdom. A kingdom is where the king rules. What the king commands happens. Everything in the kingdom belongs to the king.

Jesus died so that your life would no longer belong to you but to him who gave his life for you. No longer ruled by your desires but ruled by the only Son of God.

All this he has done that I might belong to him, live under him in his kingdom and serve him.

Serve him.

Jesus told the parable of some who served him and of some that did not. The scene he pictures is of the final judgement – gathered before the Son of Man are all the nations. In his parable everything depends on whether a person fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited those sick or in prison, gave drink to the thirsty. This parable shows us just how important to Jesus are those who suffer. He said that as we serve them we serve him.

Now Jesus could have told a parable in which we said, “Come into my kingdom for you preached sermons for me, sang in the choir for me, ushered during worship for me, lit the candles for me, served communion for me, prepared the table for me.” Jesus did not pick out any of our religious acts but said that as we feed the hungry we feed him, as we clothe the naked we clothe him.

People are what matter to Jesus. Sometimes the people who belong to Jesus can forget that. We can become so concerned about our worship and our singing and our preaching that responding to the needs of people can get lost.

A few years ago Paul Simon, a Missouri Synod Lutheran and a former U.S. Senator spoke to a gathering of ELCA pastors. He told us that at our annual meeting we should read Matthew 25:31-46 and then ask how we as a church served Christ in the hungry and the naked, the thirsty, the sick, prisoners. Everything we do should relate to our helping people in need.

I think of our confirmation ministry. Is it time to turn it all upside down, to visit in the nursing home instead of taking sermon notes? Helping with Family of promise instead of serving as acolytes? Maybe is it not an either or. Maybe we can do both.

But it is clear that serving Jesus involves serving those in need. May God help us to do that. Amen.