

SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 22, 2020

TEXT: MATTHEW 25: 31-33

THEME: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SHEEP AND A GOAT

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

In the name of Jesus:

Many of us have a fear of Judgement Day. We have experienced our own days of reckoning in the past: days when the truth finally comes out. These days may include the taking of a final exam that you really weren't prepared for, or it may be a day when someone you know finally finds out the truth about you or a situation that you were a part of. Judgement Days are to be feared, for no one wants to be judged and have the ugliness of the truth that you have been hiding revealed.

On this Last Sunday of the church year, our attention turns to Jesus' words to His disciples about the coming Final Judgment, the Day when everything will be revealed. A day that is described in our text as a day when our Lord Jesus Christ will separate the sheep from the goats. So, why does Jesus use these descriptions and what exactly is the difference between a sheep and a goat?

While I am your pastor, and in a sense your spiritual shepherd, I am not an expert on the difference between sheep and goats. I do know how to tell the difference between sheep and goats, and at least in North America, one can spot the difference, because sheep look fluffy with wool and goats do not.

But in Jesus' day and age, and this still holds true in parts of Asia and Africa, sheep and goats are almost identical. You can't tell them apart by looking at them. No one but a shepherd can easily tell the difference between the sheep and the goat. And that is a part of what Jesus is trying to tell us today, that on the Last Day, when people are judged, when He separates the sheep from the goats, the people will not look any different from anyone else. So Jesus here is saying that when He comes to judge, He won't be judging people on how they look, He won't judge them based on the color of their hair, the skin tone of their flesh, people won't be judged on their looks, their height, their weight, or any other outward characteristic. So what will be the criteria that Jesus will use to make His judgement? Jesus will base His judgement on what He sees in people. He will look at their hearts, and on the basis of what is in their hearts Jesus will make His judgement. That, and that alone will be the basis for Jesus' judgement.

So what is the difference between sheep and goats? Goats are independent. They have the reputation of being curious and opinionated.

Nothing wrong with that, but goats are so independent that they live as if they have no need for a shepherd. They don't want to submit to the leader of a shepherd, they want to lead themselves. To that end, goats can be and are destructive. Goats will chew up and destroy things by their very nature. It is commonplace for a goat to use its horns to ram into objects and utterly destroy things, for no good reason at all. A goat will not follow anyone and a herd of goats will go where it wants, foraging for whatever strikes their fancy.

Sheep are different. Yes, they can and do get into trouble, but sheep are not independent creatures. They need a shepherd and depend upon their shepherd. They rely on their shepherd for their every need. Sheep always have been and always will be defenseless, they need protection and the provisions that only a shepherd can provide.

So Jesus uses sheep and goats as a way to describe the two types of people that are in the world. We can't differentiate between these two types of people, only Jesus can. Both on the surface do good. Both types of people feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drinks to those who thirst, are kind to those in need, they would be considered by their fellow human beings as genuinely good people, nice people. But there is a difference! Jesus tells us the difference, the line of demarcation, if you will, when He says to the goats to

depart from Him, for He never knew them, and when He says to His own that “whatever you did to the least of these you did it also to Me.”

The difference between the sheep and the goats is knowing Jesus. Not knowing in an intellectually type of way, but know in placing their faith, their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Goats are independent, and so, true to their nature, they live independently from Jesus. They have no need of Jesus in their lives. They are blissfully ignorant of Christ’s love for them. They serve another master, their selfish will, their own sinful desires, they are in love with the world rather than Jesus. And so on Judgment Day the Lord tells them to depart, for He never knew them.

But Jesus, they will say, what about all the good we did? What about the people we fed, the clothes we gave to those in need, all the charities we supported? What about the times we went to church? And yet Jesus says for them to depart from Him, for they never loved Jesus, they never served Jesus, they lived for themselves.

While this serves as a warning to all of us, Jesus invites you and reminds you to turn from yourself, your sin, the sinful world you live in and follow Him. Take up your cross, Jesus says, and follow Him. Follow Him who loves you with an everlasting love. Follow Him who lived, died and rose again for your forgiveness and salvation. Follow Him who laid down His life for you so that

you might have life forever. Follow Him who rose from the grave so that by the power of His name you might rise to serve your Lord Jesus in all that you do.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows His own and His own knows Him. Just as a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so Jesus seeks His sheep and rescues them from all harm and danger. He washes away your sin in Baptism. He leads and guides you by His Word. He feeds you with His own body and blood. Jesus is your Good Shepherd and even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death in the midst of this Pandemic, you don't have to fear any evil. Jesus loves you. He will take care of you. And Jesus invites you to continue to follow Him, repenting of sin and focusing your eyes and life on Jesus, for Jesus seeks to work in and through you to share His love with others.

Once there was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it would be a long trip to where God lived, so he packed a suitcase full of his favorite foods, Twinkies and cans of root beer and set off on his journey. He had only gone a few blocks when he passed an older woman, sitting on a park bench and just staring at some pigeons. She looked sad and lonely, so the boy went over and sat down next to her. He opened his suitcase, took out a package of the Twinkies and offered it to her.

She gratefully took it and smiled at him. He loved her smile and wanted to make her smile again, so he offered her a can of his root beer. Once again, she took it and smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon, eating the Twinkies, drinking the root beers and watching the pigeons, without saying a word to each other.

As it grew dark, the boy realized that he had better get started home and got up to leave. But before he had just a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the older woman and gave her a big hug. She gave him the biggest smile of all.

When the boy got home, his mother noticed how happy he seemed. So she asked him what he had done all day. He told her: "I had lunch with God. And you know what? She has the most beautiful smile that I've ever seen."

Meanwhile, the older woman had returned to her home. Her son also noticed how happy and content she seemed so he asked her what she had done that had made her so happy. She said to him: "I sat in the park and ate Twinkies with God. You know, he's much younger than I expected."

When Jesus separates the sheep from the goats He will say to His own: 'Come, you who 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 drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' **37** Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? **38** And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? **39** And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' **40** And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Amen