

“AS WE BELIEVE, SO WE SING:  
Iii - ‘From Thence He Shall Come To Judge  
The Quick And The Dead’”  
Karen F. Bunnell  
Elkton United Methodist Church  
July 25, 2010

Matthew 25:31-46

One day in the recent past, I was some place where there was nothing to do but watch television, and it was a place where I didn't have a TV guide, and didn't know how to find the guide on the cable on that particular television. So you know what that means - just checking it out one channel at a time - scrolling up the channels. And you know what I discovered that afternoon? There are an awful lot of “judge” shows on television. Judge Judy, Judge Joe Brown, Judge This, Judge That - you name it - they're all over the place.

Well, just because I was bored, I caught a few minutes of one of those shows, and it was a joke. The behavior was outrageous - even the judge's. And it never really seemed that the defendants and the plaintiffs had much respect for the process, let alone the judge.

Now, I've never had to stand before a judge - thank goodness - but if I did, I would think it might be rather intimidating. I might even be scared, even though I knew I had done nothing wrong.

It's like a couple of months ago, when I was driving over to my mother's, along Welsh Tract Road, and all of a sudden I came upon a New Castle County cop making a signal to pull over. My heart began racing - what had I done? Was I speeding? I didn't think so. I had no clue what it was about, and when I got to where the cop was standing, and opened my window, he looked at me and said “Keep going. I was pulling the guy behind you over.” Phew!!

You see what I mean. Being judged, or being called out for accounting, is a scary thing. It makes us uncomfortable, even if we think we haven't done anything.

Well, I think it makes some of us, maybe most of us uncomfortable to think of our Lord and Savior Jesus as judge. Yet, that is exactly what we say we believe in this third phase of the Apostles' Creed that we're going to consider in this sermon today - “from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

We say we believe that Jesus is judge of all, living and dead. Now, I don't

know about you, but gentle Jesus, meek and mild; the Jesus of “Amazing Grace,” the Jesus who showers upon me “grace that is greater than all my sin” is the Jesus I like to think about - Jesus the judge, is another thing altogether.

And yet, Jesus the judge is a very real part of who Jesus is. He says it in many and various ways throughout the scriptures. He says it particularly well in today’s Gospel lesson. “There will come a day,” Jesus says, “when I will judge you. A day on which some will be judged righteous, and others not. A day when some will be lifted up for the way they have lived, and some will not.”

Do you think about that much? I mean, really, do you ever think about that. I’m thinking that we don’t think about it a whole lot. We go on about our lives everyday so busy and distracted, that we just try to get through our days, never really thinking about how we’re living them and what we’re doing - or, more to the point, is how we’re living and what we’re doing pleasing to God. We don’t really take much time to ponder that day when we’ll have to answer for the lives we’ve been given. And, after all, there’s that grace that’s promised to all of us - that grace given by Christ on the cross.

Well you know what? As the great Christian writer Dietrich Bonhoeffer taught, if all we think of God’s grace poured out in Christ is that it saves us, we’ve turned it into cheap grace. Listen to these words from his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:

“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is **grace without discipleship**, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ.”  
(Online, Wikipedia, “The Cost of Discipleship”)

Boy, he puts his finger right on it! There’s more to grace than forgiveness and baptism and communion - grace calls for commitment and action on our part. And our response to God’s grace is what we will be judged upon by the Lord who sits upon the throne. He will ask if whether what we said we believed was apparent in how we lived our lives.

Consider again this morning’s Gospel lesson. Jesus says that on that day of judgement we will be divided like sheep and goats - one called righteous, the other not. And look at who Jesus called righteous - the ones who reached out and cared for others - particularly the downtrodden and suffering - the hungry, the thirsty, a stranger, the needy, the sick, those in prison.

Look further and discover that Jesus not only praises the care shown to them, but reminded the righteous that when they cared for them, they were caring

for Him - for Jesus Himself.

If you want to know what you're going to be judged on - there you go - did you reach out beyond yourself and care for other people, particularly those in need; and more than that, did you see Jesus in all of them?

The wonderful preacher Barbara Brown Taylor, in a sermon about this text, maintained that it's all about relationship. Jesus wants us to be in relationship with each other. In order to care for someone in need, you need to look at them, connect with them, see their need.

You know, we've perfected the art of not looking at people. Why look at the skit the young adults presented? Don't look at people, and you don't have to connect with them. Don't look at the first-time visitor. Don't look at the ill-kempt person. Don't look at the homeless person with the sign when you're driving out of a store parking lot. Don't look at the grieving widow, or the silent teenager.

What Jesus lifts up in this passage, is looking at them. Looking at them, paying attention to them, caring for their needs, loving them. That's the kind of life He asks us to live - as a reflection of our love for Him, and His love for us.

It's all about relationship, and helping one another, because God in Christ has helped us. Surely, most of you have heard the story of the man who had a vision of the afterlife. He is first shown a great hall with a long banquet table laden with wonderful food, at which seats many people. But each person has been given a three foot long spoon with which to eat, and of course, the utensils are too long to maneuver even a single morsel into their mouths. They look like skeletons, sitting there in mutual misery. The man's guide said to him, "This is hell."

Then the man is led to another room, where there is another huge banquet table laden with wonderful food, and surrounded with people. They have the same impossible silverware. But amazingly, the people were robust, healthy and well-fed. The man's guide said, "This is heaven."

The man with the vision was baffled. "What's the difference?"

"In Heaven," the guide replied, "they feed each other."

*(Spiritual Literacy, p.344)*

It's all about relationship. How are you doing on that account? If you were called to be judged today, how would it be for you?

I don't mean those questions as a scare tactic, nor does Jesus in this lesson.

The idea of being judged is not there to scare us, it's there, I believe, as an invitation to abundant life. Jesus the Judge wants us to know how full and rich and abundant life was meant to be, and life can be.

It's like you, who are parents, with your children. Why do you give them rules and guidelines to follow? Why do you punish them when they do wrong? It is because you delight in controlling them. No, it's because you want what's best for them, you want a life that filling and fulfilling and meaningful for them, and you're trying to guide them in the right way.

So too, with us and Jesus the Judge. It's not a matter of controlling us, or scaring us - rather, it's an invitation for you and me to know life as it was meant to be lived - full, free, abundant and eternal.

There's a man by the name of Michael Elliott who came to understand that truth in a powerful way. He worked at a homeless shelter, and particularly with the children in that shelter. Listen to what happened to him as he reached out to those children who were in such need. These are his words:

“At the shelter, I interact with these homeless children. I share their joys and their sorrows. I am a part of their lives. As I see them struggle, my own children come to mind. Some balance is struck between these children and my children. When I see a homeless child crying because her mother is too busy looking for work to pay her any attention, I remind myself to spend time with my daughter Chelsea. When a volunteer calls to say he cannot come today to take a homeless boy to a ball game, I promise myself that I will take my son Jeremy to one soon. When a homeless girl plays in the yard with broken toys, I rush home that day to play with Kristen.”

“It's a strange gift (he says). The plight of homeless children makes me more sensitive to my own family. Were it not that God knew exactly where I was needed, I doubt I would be much of a father.” (*Spiritual Literacy*, p. 337, Michael Elliott, in “Partners in Grace”)

You see, Jesus the Judge invites us to live our lives in relationship, seeing each other, caring for one another. It's abundant life, the life God wants us to live, the life God created us to live. That's what we'll be judged on - what did you do with the abundant life God gave you, the life Christ died for you to have?

This lesson today, indeed, this phrase in the Apostles' Creed, is an invitation for us to stop, step off the treadmill of our busy, distracted lives and take stock of who we are and how we're living. It's not meant to be a scare tactic, it is, indeed an invitation to, if necessary, make a course correction.

I close today with a brief story from a classroom. A preacher named Mark

Axelrod says that one day when he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the class had a substitute teacher. And you know what it's like when a substitute teacher comes in - it's an invitation to chaos, as students try to take advantage of the situation, if they can.

Well, at the beginning of the day, the principal of the school brought the substitute teacher into the classroom and said to the students, "I expect you all to be on your best behavior. I expect you to do your work. I'll be back to check on you." And off he went, leaving the class in the hands of the substitute.

Well, before long, chaos broke out. They were moving freely about the room, yelling to their friends, throwing wads of paper, you name it. The substitute had clearly lost all semblance of control.

And boom - all of a sudden - in came the principal. He looked at all of the students who were acting up, pointed to them, and said "You, you, you and you, come with me, out in the hall!" And that was that!

And Mark says he didn't see them the rest of the day. And you know what? Mark also said that he was glad that the principal had shown up to restore order.

(On-line, [sermoncentral.com](http://sermoncentral.com))

My friends, if you hear the line "from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead," and find it overwhelming or even scary, I invite you instead to think like young Mark. Think instead that it is God's way of restoring order. It is God's way of inviting us to think about our lives, how we're living them, what we're doing with them. It is God's way of reminding us that we've been given this precious gift of life, that we have only one life to live, and that we can do great things through Christ who strengthens us.

Yes, we will be judged - not just on our faith, but on how we live out our faith in our actions. May you and I, on that day, be able to stand before Jesus the Judge and say that we not only saw him in those around us, but we cared for them too. May it be so.

Amen.