

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Twenty-third & Last Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday, November 19, 2011 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 20, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“How Much Can I Get Away With and Still Go to Heaven?”

Matthew 25:31-46

This Sunday is the Last Sunday of the Church Year, the Sunday of the Fulfillment. Can you believe it? Advent starts next week. As the church year draws to a close, with the ebb and flow of the church year calendar, this is a time when we historically focus on the end times. As you have probably noticed, the appointed lessons today have to do with the last days, the coming wrath of Judgment Day, and Christ gathering up His people to give them the inheritance that has been prepared for them.

The topic of the end times, Judgment Day, when Christ returns and all things will be resolved is a topic that peaks the interest of most people. Just about everyone is interested in what is going to happen when their life on earth ends, because the end of this life, Judgment Day is coming for all of us. Even people who have little or no connection or relationship to Christ and His Church are interested in what is waiting for them at the end of this life. Even those who say there is nothing after this life have obviously given thought to what is to come.

I did a Google search and typed in, “How much can I get away with and still go to heaven?” There were a lot of very interesting answers, and some refrigerator magnets for sale with that question

printed on it. Some answers were Christ centered; many of them were very hostile toward even the concept of heaven or hell – salvation or judgment.

Christ has an answer to this question in our Gospel lesson today. The question itself is completely misguided -- as if it were our works and not Christ's work which opens the gates of heaven. The good works that we do or the sins that we commit are not the determining factors of our final judgment. We do not build up a warehouse of good works that we display before Christ on the Last Day. We do not say to Him: "Look at all of the good that I did in my life; all of the charities to which I have given my time and effort; look at all of the people I fed, clothed, sheltered, and showed kindness to during my years."

We have no right to stand before Christ and claim that warehouse of good works for our own. Besides the three warehouses of evil thoughts, unkind words, and evil deeds would dwarf our warehouse of good works.

Through our sinful eyes, we keep track of the size of our own warehouses and the size of other people's warehouses also. But God does not do that. On the Last Day, when all of mankind is gathered together; the sheep: God's faithful people will be on the right hand of Christ; and the goats on the left.

Last week, I spoke of how Humanists and those hostile toward God divide the world into two groups "the enlightened thinkers" and "the ignorant, Bronze Age idol worshipping, Bible-thumping hicks."

Jesus tells us that they are correct in the sense that there are only two groups. The distinction will be made -- some will be on

the right, some on the left. The sad thing is that God never intended it to be this way. Christ tells us that the eternal kingdom, mankind's inheritance, has been prepared for us "from the foundation of the world." God intended all of mankind to enjoy the richness of the glory of His presence.

Even after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God intended all to be saved through faith in the "Seed," the Messiah, the Savior of the world promised to Adam and Eve. Abraham received that same promise, and all of the people of the world were given the promise of the coming Messiah. We now have that promise of salvation as we have seen it fulfilled in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God meant for all to be included in His plan of salvation. As Christ says, the eternal fire of Hell was "prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell and eternal damnation was only meant for Satan and the fallen angels. It was not made for man. God sent His Son into the world that all might be saved. When people refuse the mercy and forgiveness of God, they thwart God's all inclusive plan of salvation, declare themselves an enemy of God, and doom themselves to destruction.

The vast majority who will end up on the left side of Christ have no idea that they are dooming themselves to destruction. They are trying to figure out "how much can I get away with and still go to heaven."

If they only understood that salvation comes only through forgiveness for those things that we try to get away with. God would be fair and just if He condemned us to an eternity of Hell for committing even one sin. But through faith in Christ's sacrifice on

the cross, we are clothed in Christ's righteousness so that God no longer sees those three warehouses of sins that we have committed. He has forgiven us our wickedness and remembers our sins no more [Jer. 31:34].

On the Last Day, Christ will only see the good things that we have done in our lives. The sins that we commit every day died with Him on the cross. They are gone. However, for those people who do not put their faith and trust in Christ's death at Calvary, even their good deeds are tainted with the sin that consumes their heart. There is nothing they can do that is pleasing to God.

Christ tells us that on Judgment Day, we will be judged, but our sins will not be remembered. We are going to be credited with all of the acts of kindness and mercy that we have ever shown to another person. Even though there is no comparison between the acts of mercy we show to one another and the mercy that God has shown toward us, and even though our good deeds are only good because God is the one who has cleansed us of our sin and has given us the desire to do the good deeds in the first place, and even though the mercy we show to one another is only a reflection of the mercy that God has shown toward us, we will be credited as having done those good deeds to Christ Himself.

For one penny of kindness in Christ's name shown to our neighbor, Jesus gives us an inheritance that all the gold in the world could not buy. As He says in Matthew chapter 10: "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward" [Mt. 10:42]. Amen.