

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera  
26<sup>th</sup> November 2023 – Last Sunday of the Church Year

**Matthew 25:31-36**

**WAITING ... IN LOVE**

Many years ago, Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, wrote a short story based on this parable of Jesus. It is about Martin, a shoemaker, who lived and worked alone in a tiny basement room. While reading his Bible one night, Martin read the story of the Pharisee who invited Jesus in for a meal, but who did not have the traditional courtesy to look after Him properly. Martin thought to himself, ‘He must have been like me, that Pharisee, just thinking of himself. I wonder what I would do if Jesus came to visit me?’

The next morning, while he was working by the window, Martin saw an old soldier, Stephen, working to clear the snow. Finally, Stephen stopped and leaned his shovel against the wall as if he didn’t have enough strength to go on. Martin felt sorry for him and invited him in for a warm cup of tea, all the time watching out the window for Jesus to come along.

Later he saw a lady dressed in a shabby summer dress, with nothing warm for her baby either. Martin brought them inside and fed them by his warm fire. The woman said she had not heard from her soldier husband for eight months and had no money. Martin gave her his old coat and some money.

When she had gone, Martin sat down again, still keeping a watch out for Jesus. A woman selling apples came and stopped outside his window. While she rested her load a boy came along and snatched one of her apples. The woman grabbed him and threatened to call the police. Martin rushed outside and said, ‘Let him go, lady, he’s only hungry. I’ll pay for the apple. Forgive him for Jesus’ sake. And you, boy, ask for forgiveness’. Finally, the two of them walked away together, with the boy carrying the old lady’s load.

As darkness fell, Martin felt disappointed as he was sure Jesus was coming to see him today. Then he pulled out his Bible and read, ‘*I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me ... Whenever you did it for any of my people, you did it for me*’. And then Martin understood, that in all these people Jesus had come to visit him today, and he had welcomed Him.

Over the past three weeks, in these final weeks of the Church year, we have been looking at what are often called the Parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 25. These three parables Jesus originally told just days

before His death, and they deal with that time when Jesus will come again. For me it's been interesting and informative following the three through like this; I've never really done that before, and I've found that the message of the three together is greater than the sum of their parts. The chapter begins, with the parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids; the five who had enough spare oil so they were ready to go into the feast with the bridegroom when he came, and the five who missed out on that feast because they were off buying more oil. Then there was the parable of the Talents, with three servants given different amounts of money, each according to what he could handle, while the master went away. When the master returned the two who increased their money were praised and rewarded, while the one who did nothing and buried the talents left with him was rebuked.

And so, to the third and final parable, often called the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, and used as a description of what the End Times, Judgement Day, will look like. In this parable the King comes and separates the sheep and the goats, dividing them simply on how they have responded to the needs of people around them, with that well-known judgement at the end, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me." (v. 40) Like with the first two, if we take the judgment at the end out of the context of the story and the whole Bible message it is harsh; it is meant to be, and we shouldn't completely disregard the warning here. But as I've said before, as people we have a tendency to make these teachings about 'Judgement Day' into a way of showing the supposed superiority of our own Christian life and beliefs, and not allowing them to be what they actually are; teachings about God's love and grace and a call for us to live lives, in response, to Him in our discipleship.

So often when we look at this parable, we use it as a checklist; have I been good enough? Have I done enough in feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting those in jail? If I have, well and good, and I can keep doing what I am doing and rest on my laurels. If I haven't, hurry up and get cracking, maybe buy everything in this year's ALWS Gifts of Grace catalogue, and get on it because you don't know when Jesus will come again and at least then you'll have proof to show Him of what you have done! (*That's sarcasm, btw*) That is how this parable, and all three of these parables, are often taught and viewed by us; make sure that you are making yourself ready, and that you are not left out of the feast, rebuked for doing nothing, cast aside with the goats, like we know that those other people over there will be.

When we read, hear, or study this parable, so often a key part of it is overlooked, one which changes everything. When the King comes to those on His right and praises them for what they have done, what do they say? How do they respond? Do they say, ‘yes Lord, I’m pleased you noticed’? Or, ‘Indeed I did do all those things, and I know you will now reward me for that’? What do they say here? “When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?” (v. 37-39) What is their reaction? They are surprised! What they have done is in no way their way of seeking reward, or trying to earn the King’s favour, or, taking it into the context of all three parables, making themselves ready for the Kingdom. They are who they are because of what has been done for them. God’s love has transformed them; what they believe is shown in what they now do, the love they live in is shown out in the love they now show. What they do is because of who God, in His love, has made them to be, and the love they show is their natural living out of this new life they have. They are now waiting ... in love.

To come back to looking at these three parables together, they make up a bit of a formula. In waiting in hope we know that God has prepared us, given us all we need, to be ready for the feast we are invited to. Alongside that, He calls us to worship and serve Him and to use the gifts and talents He has given us to help others to be ready for His Kingdom also. When we put those two together, we now come up with the message of the third parable, that we are waiting in love; God’s love for us, and the love which we in natural response show out to others. The three fit together so well as an illustration of God’s love for us, and the love we are now called to share.

To go back to the story of Martin the Shoemaker, this shows so simply what this is about. Martin’s thinking wasn’t, ‘I want to do good things so God will love me and bless me’, but he simply wanted to respond to Jesus’ love by welcoming Him. In three very normal, everyday interactions, Martin naturally served Jesus without even realising it. How often does that happen for you? It’s ok to think about this as ways you respond to God’s love. In what normal, everyday ways, perhaps naturally without even thinking about it, do you help those in need, support people who need support, reach out to someone who needs help, and even feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Very often our human tendency is to focus on what we don’t do, how we fall short, rather than seeing the everyday things we just do naturally. As you think about these

things, thank God for showing you His love, and for giving you the opportunities to share His love with others.

And, like with the other two parables, there is another side to this one also; the warning. In last week's parable the third servant was punished for doing nothing. This week the 'goats' don't get in trouble for what they have done wrong, but for what they failed to do right. We in our busy lives, our sometimes-selfish desire to make sure we don't miss out, our concern sometimes that helping out in that way might inconvenience us, we might do nothing. Just like we sometimes share God's love without thinking about it, sometimes we can also not share God's love, not live out our faith, without even thinking about it. Remember, those goats also said, 'when did we fail to ...?' We shouldn't just brush off that warning, but take it on board, and ask for God's help to be more seeing, and more open, to how we can help and serve others, showing out the love He always shows to us.

Waiting ... In Love. As we live in the last times, not knowing when they will end, we know that we wait in God's love; as we wait in sure and confident hope, in serving Him with what He has given us, and in living His love out in our lives. That time is not something for us to be afraid of, but through our faith in Jesus' dying and rising for us we can both look forward to the Kingdom with hope and expectation, and live both receiving and sharing God's love as children of the Kingdom today. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Thinking about those who showed God's love naturally in their lives, when are times that you do that? Take the time to think about the ways you already do what Jesus talks about here. Thank God for those opportunities to share His love.
- Thinking about those who didn't show and share God's love, are there ever times when you are also like that? Ask for God's forgiveness for this, and for His help to see the needs of people around you and to be willing to respond to them.
- As you think about the end times/judgement day/or whatever you want to call it, how do you feel about that? Are you full of joy, hope and confidence? Or are you worried about if you are ready? If you are worried, perhaps go through again the promises of love and forgiveness Jesus gives us, including in this chapter; be assured that He has made you ready. If you are joyful, thank God for that faith, and ask Him to live it out in love and service in your life.

Prayer: Thank God for the hope He gives us in Jesus. Ask Him, as people of His Kingdom, to live out our lives of hope, service, and love in Him.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler  
26.11.2023*