

Second Last Sunday of the Church Year  
 Text: Matthew 25:31-46  
 Trinity – Worden, IL & Zion – Carpenter, IL  
 Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit

In our Gospel lesson today we read of the Last Judgement, when the Son of Man shall return and sit on the throne of his glory with all his angels with him and judge all the nations of the earth. But what kind of a judge is this? A judge is supposed to set a defendant before him and calmly weigh evidence for and against. But the judge in our Gospel lesson does no such thing. He does not judge, but pre-judge. Before weighing any evidence, he simply puts one group, the sheep, on his right hand and blesses them; the other group, the goats, he places on his left and curses.

But what kind of a kangaroo court is this? Isn't this unfair? What chance did the goats have? They were just born goats, how can the judge blame them for that? As a leopard can't change his spots, so a goat can't bear wool and be a sheep. That's just the way he is. But the Judge in the Gospel lesson tosses the goats aside – and then, to back up his prejudice, he tacks on a condemnation of the goats that is flimsy at best. I mean, come on: he mentions not one good work to balance out the bad? Even Hitler built the Autobahn! But the Judge doesn't care. He just tosses out the goats because they are goats and sees no good in them.

The goats, of course, represent those people the Lord will cast into hell on the Last Day. But again, isn't this unfair? How can God blame them for being born sinners? No one asks to be born. How can this King and Judge get away with this? How can he be so callous? As St. Paul wrote in Romans 9, “**Romans 9:18-20** So then God has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" Why does he condemn goats just for being goats if God is the maker of all things, goats included? Isn't that unfair, St. Paul asks. His response: <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" God is Holy and he does what he wants. Goats are unholy so they have no place with him. And if you think that is unfair – well, if you think that is unfair, repent. Because you haven't seen unfair yet.

The goats are condemned for being goats; sinners condemned for being sinners. Actually that's quite fair indeed. It might not be pleasant to think about since Scripture makes it clear that all people, you and I included, are born sinful and unclean: but there it is, fair as can be.

What would be unfair would be a sheep judged to be a goat. It would be unfair to take a sheep and stick him in the goat herd. It would be unfair to judge a sheep to be a goat. Well, behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Behold the one true Sheep ever born. Behold his snow white wool and spotless image. Behold how he never sinned, never cursed God, never hated his neighbor or call his brother names, never hated, never stole, never gossiped, never lied. No deceit was found in his mouth. He did no violence.

Yet we goats esteemed him not. We looked away from him as one from whom men hide their eyes. There was no beauty in him. He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. He, the very Lamb of God, the very Son of the Father, took the place of the goats. He was hung on the tree of death where sinners deserve to hang. The Lord of Life was crucified. Worse than that: the Lamb of God was judged by the Father to be a goat and cried out: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" That was unfair. St. Paul put it this way, "God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become, in him, the righteousness of God."

The sinless one was judge to be the sin of the world. The Lamb died like a goat. That is a kangaroo court. That is madness. But that's God for you. Ever merciful and loving – his foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. All of us, like goats have gone astray, each to his own way. And yet, by the Lamb's stripes, the goats are made whole. More than that: in the death and rising of the Lamb in place of the goats, the goats are made into sheep of the Good Shepherd.

You were born a goat. But so that you would not have to die a goat, God killed the Lamb of God on the altar of the cross. You were born a goat, but so that you would not have to die as a goat forever in hell, God killed you first. He grabbed you by your billy goat beard and held you under baptismal waters until you choked, sputtered, and died. And then he pulled you up: and behold, not a dead goat, but a live sheep – a little lamb of the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the goats so that they might become sheep. And this Good Shepherd is all in all to the goats he has turned into sheep. He leads them beside still waters and restores their souls, he even leads them into green pastures where they may graze safely.

Indeed, he leads them to where they may feast on sheep food from heaven – not manna like the fathers ate and died, but the living bread from heaven – the true body and blood of the Good Shepherd who is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, this purchase price of your transformation from goat into sheep is what is given out at this altar, and it is what sustains you as you wait to receive that inheritance which the Son earned for you. Come receive him and be forgiven, strengthened, fed, and made free. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.