

“When Did We See You?”

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A Stewardship Reflection

Matthew 25:31-46

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Read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

What if royalty dropped by? What if some “royal highnesses” came to join us in worship? What would we do differently? How would we treat them when they arrived? Would their presence affect our worship? Our attention span? Our attendance?

What if some big-time investor came into your business? A renowned educational guru sat in on your classroom? Mike Babcock was in the stands at the arena? Andrew Lloyd Webber swung by choir practice? Would you go about your things differently?

What if it was Jesus? Not just here. All over the place. Would things be different?

II

We just heard Jesus talking about when God’s Kingdom comes. He tells stories and gives warnings, and finishes off with this parable of the sheep and the goats.

It’s judgement! This one story does not say everything important about God’s judgement. But what Jesus says here does matter. Jesus tells us that our actions matter. How we are toward others matters. Our Lord evaluates us.

Do we act with love? In particular, do we act with love to those whom our world forgets and often despises. How we act with love shows something. Our actions show how much we have realized God’s love for us. If I know that God acts with love to me — not forgetting me, though there is much despise-able about me — if I know God’s gracious, abundant love for me, then I will act with gracious, abundant love for those who need that love too. That matters.

In Jesus’ story, I am struck their reactions. Both those who are congratulated and those who are condemned, both the sheep and the goats, react the same way.

“When did we see you?”

For some, it’s “When did we see you and show love to you? Then! That was you?”

For others, it’s “When did we see you and not show love to you? Then. . . . That was you . . . ?”

III

The second group, the goats, are a warning to us. We need warnings, so thanks be to God. The first group, the sheep, are good news for us! Thanks be to God!

They had been going about their everyday lives. Those everyday lives regularly bring them together with people whom Jesus calls “the least of these.” They are people who are seen as “least” in our world’s eyes. They are without enough food, without clean water, without decent clothing, without belonging, without health, without freedom.

Ordinary folk like us, going through our ordinary days, are together with people who are “least.” Are we acting with love toward them?

I think Jesus’ list is simply getting us started. Yes, those who hunger for food, and also anyone who hungers for other things necessary to sustain life. Yes, those who are without clothes, and anyone who is vulnerable. Yes, those who are strangers, and anyone who is outcast, who is lonely, who does not fit in. Yes, those sick in their body, and anyone with a mental illness, or a malaise in their souls. Yes, those in prison, and anyone imprisoned in thoughts, shame, or grief.¹

Sometimes, that’s you. All the time, in your every-days, you are with them. How are you acting with love for them?

IV

What stories can you tell?

The United Church calls our national leader the “moderator.” A big part of a moderator’s mission is spending time with congregations around the country. Jordan Cantwell was our moderator for three years until her term ended this summer.

She knows United Church folk. She knows we too often get caught in a rut of talking about what is not working. “*Our budget in the red, again.*” “*The roof needs fixing.*” And so on. We can hit the negatives pretty hard.

Then she’s experienced what happens when the moderator shows up. All of a sudden, people start pulling out the best stories. “*We’ve started this.*” “*We’re doing that.*” And so on.

People start sharing their stories, and others around the room are going, “*I didn’t know all this was going on.*” “*This is great!*” “*Are we really doing all that?*” “*I’m so inspired.*”

“*It must be the moderator!*”

¹ I adapted this paragraph from a sermon by Rev. Trisha Elliott, “Power to Choose.” It was included in an online worship resource to support the “Loving Our Neighbours” congregational giving program produced by the United Church for 2018-2019.

Jordan knows better than that. It's not the moderator. People are inspired because they are telling the great stories of what God is doing through them.

So Jordan says, *"Don't wait for a moderator's visit to tell the stories of what you're doing. It's amazing! There is incredible stuff going on across the church."*

Sure, we've got broken roofs and challenging budgets. But the Gospel is very much alive in our communities of faith. When we tell that story of where it's coming to life, our hearts are quickened. We find hope that allows us to deal with the roofs and budgets and everything else. So, she says, "keep telling those stories!"²

V

What stories can we tell?

We often think of "church work" as stuff we do to help make our congregation healthy, our worship meaningful, our building work, and things running smoothly. Also, things we do together as church people for our neighbourhoods, our town, our world. These ways of serving are really important. They are wonderful ways God brings our different gifts together. However you serve within the church community is good and important, and we're all grateful.

But I also know you are deeply connecting into the lives of people who have nothing to do with our congregation or the church of Jesus at all. You are already together with people in need within your many neighbourhoods. You experience the grace-filled and generous love of Jesus yourself, so you are acting with grace-full and generous love for your neighbours in need.

In the worship bulletin, I've put some questions.

1. What is so important to you that you're willing to sacrifice (time, talents, treasures) significantly for it?
2. Where are you serving others beyond church-sponsored activities? (For example, parenting, neighbourhood, community, workplace, world.)
3. How does this service relate or connect to your faith?
4. How has our congregation sustained you in this service (if at all)?
5. How can our congregation support your service?³

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8ZviGS841w&feature=youtu.be>

³ Adapted from Bradley T. Morrison, Already Missional: Congregations as Community Partners (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2016), 22-23.

I want to hear your stories. I want to give thanks for them, learn from you, and help you however I can. So please take these questions with you, and send me an email or write me a letter to tell me about these things.

VI

See, I am concerned about your spiritual life. Jesus says that when you are with a neighbour in need, you are with him. That's spiritual! What you do for those who are poor, you are doing for him. That's holy. When you act with love for someone who is "least," you are giving your love to Jesus. That's sacred.

You walk among royalty. Probably not the Queen. Not people of great fame and accomplishment. Neighbours. Neighbours who have great need for acts of love. With them is Jesus: the King of the cosmos, the Lover of their souls and ours.

When you are walking with Jesus, you will have great stories to tell!

Thanks be to God. Amen.