

Gospel Reflection - By Greg Sunter

This week's gospel is the final passage in Matthew's gospel before the passion narrative—the death and resurrection of Jesus. As such, it provides a powerful end point to the teaching ministry section of the gospel. In many ways this passage can be seen as a summary of Jesus' vision for the Kingdom—a world in which the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and the imprisoned are treated with respect and dignity as a child of God. This is exactly what Jesus himself did throughout his ministry and it is what all Christian people are called to do.

Like the virtuous people of the passage, there are many times when we do not know the good work that we do. There are many times when our positive interaction with another person can be the difference between hope and despair for that person—and we may never know the difference we have made in their life. The challenge presented by Jesus is that whenever we see a person in need our response to them should be as if we were responding to Jesus himself.

But what of the times we fail to respond to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and the imprisoned? Who are they for us? ... That irritating person who we've never been able to get along with? ... That person who's just arrived in the country and can't speak the language properly? ... That kid who always looks dirty and nobody talks to? ... That girl who's no good at relating to other people and everyone avoids her? ... The homeless man in the street who asks for money? ... The asylum seeker fleeing their country who didn't go through all the right channels to immigrate? ... Lord, when did we see you, and not come to your help?

Gospel Focus—The Final Judgment

Often referred to as “The Final Judgment,” this gospel presents an understanding of judgment and punishment that reflects the theology and culture of the first century. It is an image that has continued to dominate Christian art and theology for most of its history: the idea of God sitting in judgment on the final day and weighing up each individual's actions. It is often applied very literally and it is a dominant image of God represented in the media—TV sit-coms and movies often draw on the image. It is a literalist image of God that needs to be challenged. We must remember that the focus of the gospel passage is on the call to action for justice.

Digging Deeper - Scripture Questions

Questions for Teens

- *List some of the conditions that characterize the “least”? Do they still exist today?*
- *What does the parable tell us about the connection between the poor, suffering and marginalized and the “King”? (They are Him!)*
- *When have you helped someone in need? What happened /how did it make you feel?*
- *When have you ever failed to help someone in need? Why did you not help?*
- *Compare this reading with Luke 4:16-21. What message is evident in both readings?*
- *What do you think the truth that Jesus is teaching in this parable?*

Questions for Adults

- *What message or challenge emerges from the gospel passage for you?*
- *Which groups are the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, and imprisoned today?*
- *How can you make a difference to one of these groups or individuals?*
- *How might the Church better respond to the face of Jesus in the needy today?*