

God's grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The passage we just read from Matthew is a text that fits in the genre known as eschatological, which is to say it focuses on end times things. This passage might rub some people the wrong way for a number of reasons, but perhaps the biggest reason why some people, Christians included, wouldn't like this text is because it explicitly says that some will be chosen for eternal life, others won't. Some will be sheep, some will be goats. But this shouldn't surprise us at all, Jesus did say a few chapters earlier in Matthew's gospel that "many are called but few are chosen" (Mt. 22:14).

But one thing I want to ask you all is how does this text fit into our current focus on stewardship?

Now, if you could, turn to your neighbor to see what this passage has to do with stewardship...and remember, stewardship is about managing what we have received from God.

(Take a couple minutes to talk)

This passage is all about stewardship. But there is a twist. If you look at verse 37 you'll notice that the righteous ones, the sheep that are chosen by God, are people who simply did God's will without even thinking about it, without even knowing it. And if you look at verse 44, you'll notice that the accursed people, the goats, the ones who were cut off from God to spend eternity in fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels, these people didn't do God's will and didn't realize there weren't doing God's will. So what is the difference between the two? Faith. The sheep were faithful; they trusted in God, they believed that Jesus truly is Immanuel, "God with

us.” The goats were not faithful; and because they weren’t faithful they didn’t act like faithful people of God.

Let’s look a little bit more in depth at the faithful people, or the righteous as Jesus calls them, who served God without even knowing that they were serving God in the first place. Faithful disciples of Jesus Christ simply do what their Lord commands of them. We heard those two commands a few weeks ago when we read from the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Matthew where Jesus said that we are to love God and love our neighbors. That’s pretty much it. Love God, love your neighbors. And what our passage gets at is that the one who loves God and loves their neighbors will simply do it without even thinking about. Disciples of Jesus Christ will love God and love their neighbors simply because that’s what they do. It doesn’t look too exciting, as Jesus says, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (25:35-36). Or the Christian’s life can be summed up in the words at the beginning of our bulletin; We live to give ourselves away. Or if we want to borrow the slogan from Nike, disciples of Jesus Christ “just do it.” They practice their baptism in love toward God and love toward their neighbors.

So this passage is all about stewardship, it’s about how we live our lives as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and we live that life of faith so well that we don’t even know we are doing God’s will when we are doing God’s will. And stewardship is all encompassing; it’s about using everything at our disposal for the sake of our Lord and our God, and for the sake of our neighbor. It’s about being faithful where God has called us to work, whether it’s at a factory, at a school, at

the mill, it's about being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ as a mother, or father, or grandparent, or a student. Being a steward of God's gifts impacts absolutely every area of our life.

Psalm 8:3-6 gets at this fact too. The Psalmist prayed, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet." From this passage we see how God has given us this huge responsibility to care for, basically, everything.

Ever since I was a kid, which I guess wasn't too long ago, I have been a fan of comic books. So the last 10 years or so have been a really good time for comic book nerds like myself. There's been movies about the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, Thor, Iron Man, Captain America, Batman and Superman have been resuscitated, and for those of you who may have liked DC comics instead of Marvel comics, there's even a movie about the Green Lantern. But of course, I've saved the best for last: the best super hero ever dreamed up by Stan Lee, Spider-Man. But to get back to the point, Spider-Man's uncle Ben said to him once, "with great power comes great responsibility." And for people of faith, the same line of thinking holds true. The great power we have is something called faith – an unflinching trust in God's mercy shown to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the great responsibility we have is to be stewards of God's gifts to us. And this responsibility means that we will be in a God given relationship with those who hunger, who thirst, who are naked, who are sick, and who are in prison, and as Jesus

reminds us in our passage from today, we will be in a relationship with those people and we might not even know it.

And this leads me to say a couple things about the pledge cards. For those of you who have brought them in; thank you very much. For those of who haven't, please do your best to get them in. Those resources help this body of Christ to make a powerful difference here in this community and abroad. Perhaps a way that all of you can think about the pledges is that this is one way where you can make a difference feeding, clothing, visiting, and helping those who Jesus calls "the least of these," and you will be doing God's will without even realizing it. Or if you absolutely must know where your finances are going, you can always swing by the office to see or hear about how it's being used for God's glory, in loving service to our neighbors.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has given us all the important task to continue being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, and to be so faithful that we do God's will without even realizing it, just like how a super hero is so good at what they do that they, they don't even realize it. The way we respond as disciples of Jesus will vary from person to person – some will be able to give a lot financially, some will be able to give a lot of their time and energy, and some will be able to use their talents of planning or thinking or dreaming. Some of you will help provide food and drink, some of you will help provide clothing, some of you will be able to simply be present for those who are sick and suffering, but all of you will continue to do God's will in some way, shape, or form wherever God has called you. All of the gifts that God has given you, of course, pale in comparison to the gift that God has already given to you to assure you that you indeed are sheep and not goats; that gift being Jesus Christ and him alone. Amen.