



First Lutheran Church

Gospel of Matthew

Summer 2026 Reading Challenge



Devotion Time: Week 13: Matthew chapters 25 and 26
Prayer Time

Prepare us, O God, for your coming judgement. Set our hearts not only on right beliefs, but also on right actions. Open our hands that we may serve, set our feet on the path to helping those in need. And may our actions of helping others be done in joy of knowing we are serving you in them. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

The end of the world is tomorrow, and now you are worried you might not make the cut. What do you do? Well, according to Jesus' parables leading up to the final parable, there is not much left to do. You are called to be prepared for this moment, and this is not a final exam we can cram for in one night. This is judgment based on a lifetime of living. Are you the sheep or are you the goat? That becomes the question in the final parable Jesus gives in Matthew's Gospel.

Tough, I know. Shattering to our heart and our ego and our desire to have gotten our right beliefs in order. Shattering also to all those who pushed living according to a certain set of morals (sexual behavior based, mostly), or living according to a correct ethnic designation (northern European/white American based, mostly), or living under the correct social hierarchy (husband/father dominated society based, mostly). Yes, this parable shatters all those constructs. Because the separation of sheep from goats has nothing to do with following husband's lead in the voting booth, sleeping with the right person, or shunning Kwanzaa. It has everything to do with how we have treated other people.

And if we are surprised now, we have not read anything in Matthew's Gospel or anything in all the rest of the Bible. The first creation story in Genesis tells us God created humanity in God's own image ... all of humanity ... not just people of a certain race or gender or sexual identity ... all people. All people bear God's image. The judgment will only highlight how we have seen Christ in all people. How do we see Christ in the homeless, the abused, the imprisoned, the hungry, those who look like us, those who do not look like us, those who our government tossed bombs at like candy at a holiday parade, those who our government tells us to ignore because they come from places we don't like ... everyone.

You can't recover a lifetime of seeing Christ in others in the final day.

But the grace is here. Tomorrow is not the end of the world. Today and tomorrow are days for us to live as the sheep. To serve others in ways that are surprising to them and to us, because in that neighbor, even the one who doesn't know the name Jesus, is our Lord, waiting to be served, as we have been served first.

Random Acts of Kindness

Over the last couple of decades this expression has become quite popular. Beginning in 1982 in response to the phrase "random acts of violence and senseless acts of cruelty", the expression was trying to get us to see the world differently. In 1993 it became part of a title to a book "Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty" by Anne Herbert (who originated the phrase). This book highlighted stories of people doing randomly kind acts for others.

Doing random acts of kindness, the expression goes, leads us to changing our view that the world is just violent and falling apart, and we see change in how people respond to the random acts of kindness.

In the musical "Come From Away" one character reflects on how the kindness of the people of Gander led him to use the anniversary of 9/11 to always do random acts of kindness.

Gathered by God, we live our faith with: Compassion, Grace, Gratitude, and Joy

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