The Face of Jesus: Matthew 25:31-46
Reign of Christ: November 22, 2026
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There are certain medical appointments that most of us know are good for us, even if we don't particularly look forward to them. Wellness checks - like mammograms. You've had one or known your friend, mother, sister or wife who has had one.

The most notable part of this wellness check is the uncomfortable squeeze. The purpose isn't simply the discomfort, but to see what is happening underneath the surface. To get a picture of what might not otherwise be visible. To catch something early, before it becomes a bigger problem. It's not enjoyable, but it is important.

Today's passage is itself a bit of an uncomfortable squeeze. A wellness check. Jesus is pressing us to look beneath the surface of our lives, beyond what we say we believe, beyond the image we present to others, and to consider what is really going on underneath. What is the condition of our hearts?

A wellness check isn't a test that we have to pass in order to be loved by God, but an opportunity to examine the condition of our spiritual lives. The Feasting on the Word commentary suggests: "Its purpose is not to condemn or scare us but to provide a snapshot of our overall health, development, learning, and growth that should lead to new habits and ways of life." (*Feasting on the Word*, p. 816)

I appreciate that image. Because sometimes we need to stop and take a look at what is happening underneath the surface. We can become quite comfortable with our religious lives. We attend worship. We say our prayers. We know the stories. We know the language of faith.

But what is happening underneath? Are we becoming more loving? More generous? More compassionate? More attentive to the people around us? Or are we becoming more concerned with ourselves? More preoccupied with our own comfort? More indifferent to the struggles of others?

The same commentary makes a rather sobering observation: "Growing antagonism and cooling love are among the most dangerous cancers facing followers of Christ." (p. 816) Those are things that can happen gradually. We may not even notice. We become impatient with people who inconvenience us. We become suspicious of people who are different from us. We become less willing to make room for people whose circumstances are unfamiliar or whose needs are demanding.

Our world can become smaller. Our circle of concern can become narrower. And before we know it, we have become quite comfortable with a faith that asks very little of us.

The point isn't that we have to do everything for everyone. None of us can meet every need or solve every problem and not called to ignore care for ourselves. But the Holy Spirit shapes us to become people who are available. People who notice. People who are willing to respond. People in whom the love of God is becoming more visible in the way we live.

This passage is the only detailed depiction in the Gospels of the final day of judgement, when the Son of Man, the King of the Heavenly Kingdom, comes in glory and all the nations are gathered before him.

And both the sheep and the goats are surprised by the King's evaluation.

The sheep are surprised. "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"

They don't remember doing any of these things for Jesus. They weren't keeping track. They weren't accumulating good deeds. They weren't looking for opportunities to earn spiritual points. They weren't trying to impress anyone. They were simply living their lives, responding in love to the people around them.

And the goats are surprised. "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?"

Their response suggests that if they had known Jesus was there, they would have acted differently. If only they had known that the person in need was actually the King of creation, they would have done something.

And that is precisely the point. "The King is looking for a natural overflowing of love, not calculated efforts designed to project a certain image." (*Feasting on the Word*, p. 817)

The sheep weren't doing good deeds because they knew Jesus was watching. They were doing them because compassion had become part of who they were. The passage is not telling us that we earn salvation by being generous, kind, or compassionate. Salvation is God's gift. It is God's grace that makes new life possible.

But grace changes us. The mercy and love we receive through Jesus begins to shape the way we see other people and the way we respond to them. "We love as an expression of the love that is inside of us, bubbling up, spilling over, and flowing out." (p. 817)

We might expect that the King would be identified with power, wealth, and prestige. We might expect that we would find him among the important people, the influential people, the people who have their lives together. The sheep and goats are both shocked to discover

that the King of Heaven was in their midst the whole time. “Whenever you do this for the least of these, you do it to me.”

God is not a remote, supreme being seated on a throne somewhere above the clouds, removed from the ordinary messiness of human life. Instead, Jesus tells us that God is present in the very places we might least expect. God is present in the vulnerable, the overlooked, and the forgotten.

These three parables near the end of Matthew’s gospel are Jesus answering the question, “When is the Kingdom of God coming?”

Bridesmaids - prepare to wait, but be assured it is coming
Three Servants - learn to trust the goodness of God and use your talents wisely
Sheep & Goats - the kingdom of heaven is already breaking in among you.

Surprise! We may think of ourselves as the ones who help, the ones who give, the ones who offer something to people in need. But Jesus turns that understanding around. Sometimes the person we think we are helping is the person through whom we encounter Jesus among us.

Mission statement: As followers of Jesus, together… we serve with grace and hope. Called to live out the love we have been given. The grace we have received overflows in and through us. And we serve with hope. We cannot possibly solve every problem, but we can trust God is doing so, and we are invited to participate in what God is up to in the world.

So perhaps this passage is a kind of spiritual wellness check. An uncomfortable squeeze inviting us to look beneath the surface of our lives and ask some honest questions.

Session wrestled with a request to give public feedback to City Council for the zoning of the proposed shelter location on south railway.

- What values were guiding our support or opposition?
- What resources do those who are unhoused, or the businesses in the area, have to advocate?
- How is God calling us to live as neighbours in our downtown community?

The elders decided to submit a letter from Session, not speaking on behalf of the congregation. It speaks in favour of the rezoning application. Took this step not to win some divine humanitarian award or earn salvation. But because Jesus and his parables continue to work in our lives. God's grace transforms us. It changes what we notice, how we respond, and who we are becoming. Trusting that we too will be surprised that we have encountered Jesus in places we never thought to look.