

***Do It For Me***  
**Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Matthew 22:37-40, 25:31-46**

For the month of November I have focused the messages on the overall topic, "Who Are Our Neighbors" as we reflect on Jesus' commands in The Gospel According to Matthew 22:37-40:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In subsequent passages from the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus uses parables to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like. In each one Jesus has spoken of how his followers are to live until he comes again. I invite you to hear the reading for this day as it comes from the very familiar passage 25:31-46.

"When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, members of my family, you did it to me."

Jesus said it: profound, radical words. Words that echo everyday in my mind as I see poor people asking for money, for food, for help with electricity. And each time, trying to determine where best to refer them and how best to help them, this passage makes me very uncomfortable. I cannot help everyone. Besides how can I be sure who really needs food and who simply wants money to support their drug or alcohol addictions? Is it up to me to make these determinations, or should I simply trust and remember what Jesus said, "When you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, members of my family, you did it to me."

Sick, hungry, homeless, oppressed, imprisoned - what you do for the least of these – you do for me. In these familiar words of Jesus there are three profoundly important ideas.

First, is a statement about God. The God of Jesus. The God of the Bible is not a remote supreme being on a throne up there above the clouds in the mysterious reaches of the universe. Jesus said, God is here, in the messiness and ambiguity of human life. God is here, particularly in your neighbor's, the ones who need you. You want to see the face of God? Look into the face of one of the least of these, the vulnerable, the weak, the children.

The second radical statement is about the practice of religion. You cannot read the daily paper and not be concerned about the role religion plays in the world. Terrible things are committed by people yelling, "God is great!" Religious officials hide clergy abuse; deny sacraments to those with whom they disagree. Religious leaders condemn each other, excommunicate each other, invest inordinate amounts of energy and resources fighting one another over who gets in and who is to be kept out, over whose is right and who is wrong, over a whole laundry list of issues about Jesus said absolutely nothing. He did however, say this: "When you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." There is not a word in this passage about theology, creed, or religious practices. There

is only one criterion here and that is whether or not you saw the face of Jesus Christ in the face of the needy and whether or not you gave yourself away in love in his name.

The third most important thing in this passage is not social, political, or economic. It is personal. God wants a new world modeled on the values of Jesus. God wants us – each one of us. God is not a social engineer but a God of love who wants to save our souls. God wants to save our souls and redeem us and give us the gift of new life – true, deep, authentic human life. God wants to save us by touching our lives with love. God wants to save us by persuading us to care and see other human beings who need us. God wants to save us from obsessing about ourselves, our own needs, by persuading us to forget about ourselves and worry about others. That is God's favorite project: to teach you and me that to love is to live.

Today, as we come to the Table of Our Lord, we come, not for ourselves but for God. We come because God so loved ALL the world that he sent his only son, that all who believe in him might be saved. We come to this table that has been prepared for us and ALL are welcome. We come realizing that this table is not about us, but about God's love for us.