

I Was Hungry
[Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18](#)
[Matthew 25:31-46](#)

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 Lynnewood United Methodist Church
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The Gospel reading is read by the leader and the "sheep" and the "goats."

Matthew 25:31-46

Common English Bible

Leader: "Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

Then the king will say to those on *his right*, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then those who are righteous will reply to him,

Congregation's left side: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

Leader: "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn't give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

"Then they will reply,

Congregation's right side: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn't do anything to help you?'

Leader: Then he will answer, 'I assure you that when you haven't done it for one of the least of these, you haven't done it for me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life."

Well, how does it feel to be the "sheep"? (What do you have to say for yourselves? Baaa!) And how does it feel to be the "goats"? (And what do you have to say for yourselves???)

The writer of Matthew says it's an *either-or* situation. Either we're on the right with the sheep, or we're on the left with the goats. Either we will inherit the kingdom or, too bad, we will not. Either we will demonstrate our love for Jesus by caring for our neighbors, or, sadly, we will choose another path. We *can* feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner, if we choose to.

Jesus commands us that if we love him we *must* care for the needy. He says, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." If we love God, we must love our neighbors as family and treat them as sisters and brothers.

Our scripture passage, often called "the judgment of the gentiles" directly follows two parables in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus has just told stories about being ready and being responsible. Now he says very clearly, God judges us by our deeds. We must put into practice Jesus' teachings and live responsibly. The author of this text likely experienced starvation, unemployment, and poverty all around him. The writer of Matthew would have lived through the Jewish-Roman War from the year 66 to 73 CE, and he would have known the devastation it brought. And into this context the author brings the Son of Man—the Human One in the Common English Bible. In Jewish tradition, it was expected that the king should be responsible for the needs of the poor, but in Roman times, there was no Jewish king caring for the people. It was Jesus who came, not as a political leader, but as a servant, a "Human One" who preached justice for all who suffer.

If we are passive, we side with the goats. We must side with God as the responsible king, and let God shape us and our world into a promise of justice and peace.

I can think of no better example of one who fed the hungry and stood with the poor than Mother Teresa. Today at 10:00 a.m. in St. Peter's Square in Rome, some 80,000 people witnessed the canonization of St. Teresa of Kolkata by Pope Francis at a Jubilee mass to honor the workers of the Year of Mercy.

Many of us have thought of Mother Teresa as a saint for a long time. She was born with the name Gonda in Macedonia to Albanian parents in 1910. Raised in a devout family, she took her First Communion at 5 1/2. At the age of 12, she announced she wanted to become a missionary and serve the poor. At 18 she became a nun, joining the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland and took the name Teresa, for Thérèse of Lisieux, her patron saint. After nine years with the Sisters of Loreto, Teresa took her final vows, and from then on was called Mother Teresa. She was sent to Calcutta, India, where she taught at St. Mary's High School for 17 years. Then in 1948 she founded the Missionaries of Charity to serve the poorest of the poor first in India, and then around the world.

Teresa had a deep prayer life. The Psalm we read today speaks of an intimate relationship with God. Teresa had such a relationship with God. She speaks of an interior "darkness" in her writings. She seemed to long for God, and she was drawn to human suffering. Like

other mystics, she chose a meditative life, and hers was a "dark" life, as if she herself wanted to suffer as Jesus did on the cross. I saw a video some years ago of Mother Teresa touring a newly built convent for the Missionaries of Charity in a poor neighborhood in the United States. The priest showing her the building took her into an empty room, newly carpeted, where the nuns would sleep. She told the priest to rip out the carpet; the nuns didn't need carpet, they could sleep on a hard floor.

Mother Teresa has been criticized for her "dark" side. But listen to some of the things she said.

"I see Jesus in every human being. I say to myself, this is hungry Jesus; I must feed him. This is sick Jesus. This one has leprosy or gangrene; I must wash him and tend to him. I serve because I love Jesus."

"Seeking the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time, and his hand in every happening. This is what it means to be contemplative in the heart of the world. Seeing and adoring the presence of Jesus, especially in the lowly appearance of bread, and in the distressing disguise of the poor" (Mother Teresa, *In the Heart of the World: Thoughts, Stories and Prayers*, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/252963-seeking-the-face-of-god-in-everything-everyone-all-the>).

"I never look at the masses as my responsibility. I look at the individual. I can love only one person at a time. I can feed only one person at a time. Just one, one, one. You get closer to Christ by coming closer to each other. As Jesus said, "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me." So you begin....I began. I picked up one person. Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person I wouldn't have picked up 42,000. The whole work is only a drop in the ocean. But if I didn't put the drop in, the ocean would be one drop less. Same thing for you...same thing in your family...same thing in the church where you go...Just begin...one, one, one."

"At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was homeless and you took me in.' Hungry not only for bread—but hungry for love. Naked not only for clothing---but naked of human dignity and respect. Homeless not only for want of a room of bricks—but homeless because of rejection. This is Christ in distressing disguise" (*Mother Teresa: Words to Love By*, 76-77).

"The world today is hungry not only for bread but hungry for love; hungry to be wanted, to be loved. There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives--the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. The poor you may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them."

"We can do no great things; only small things with great love."

"By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus."

Mother Teresa took a bishop through the streets of India. She asked,
"Would you like to see Jesus?"

[They went around a few walls to a man lying on a black leather pallet, who clearly had visible things crawling on his body. As the bishop stood there in shock, Mother Teresa knelt down and wrapped her arms around him, holding him like a baby.]

"Here he is," she said.

The bishop asked, "Who?"

"Jesus. Didn't he say you'd 'find me in the least person on earth?' Isn't this Jesus challenging us to reach out and love?"

Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me"

(<http://www.wright-house.com/religions/christianity/mother-teresa.html>).