

““When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for 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.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘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?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘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?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.””

Matthew 25:31-46 NRSV

It's called The Talk and it's something every parent has had with every child. Whether it's when they're going to spend the night at a friend's house or stay home when the parents will leave for the weekend or when they go off to high school or college or any other events. It's the parents saying to the kids please behave and your actions matter, and there are consequences to those actions.

This text from Matthew is Jesus version of The Talk. Known as the final judgment or the judgment of the nations, Jesus says your actions matter and your actions have consequences. He particularly notes our actions with “the least of these” or the most vulnerable. He goes as far to say that as you care for such people you care for Him. His words hit home to me for they ask of me what am I doing for the least of these? His words get very practical as they ask what am I doing to feed the hungry, to close naked, to welcome the stranger, to heal the sick, and to visit those in prison. I'm grateful for the good work of Deborah Taylor our director of Serve for regularly giving me the opportunities to feed and visit and love. But I wonder about more.

This Holy Week, consider what God is calling you to do in terms of actions to help others. Pray that God will stir you up and open up ways to feed and heal and love and visit. Here's a start: pay attention to the newsletter of the self food pantry as well as our church newsletter and current needs of food and hygiene items. Make in a weekly habit to address those needs. For your actions of consequences and your actions matter.

But I need to add one more thing in this. As important as your actions are, I want to be careful that we don't practice or works righteousness faith. That is we believe we are saved by our works. I read this judgment scene for Matthew as reminded that my actions matter and my actions have consequences for others and for me. But I take hope in the belief that even when I'm not doing as I should, I am saved by grace. That at the right time, while I was a sinner, Christ died for me. This good news is the heart of Holy Week and gives me a new opportunity for love and service to others. This good news is what inspires me to love in great response.

*Gracious God, help me all to remember that my actions matter, and my actions have consequences for others and for me. Teach me to remember my days and to not squander my opportunities. And when I fail, draw me back to you and your grace. Thank you for new opportunities of love and faithfulness; in the name of the Father and the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*