

Matthew 7:21-29

Anyone out there just a little bit frightened by what I just read from Matthew's Gospel today? Anyone willing to admit, they're frightened? I will certainly be the first person to raise my hand and say I am a just little bit concerned when Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Not only am I a bit frightened, but I also find myself just a teensy-weeny bit confused by Jesus next statement. "On that day (referring to Judgment day) many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?'" Did I not preach from this pulpit in your name? Did I not serve down at that soup kitchen last Thursday in your name? Did I not just place my offering in the plate in your name? Did I not just wake at 5:30 this the morning to serve your church in your name?"

And Jesus response to all that is 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoer.'" "I never knew you." What could be more frightening or even more perplexing than Jesus' response to all that we have done in His name? "I never knew you!"

One of my reactions to this passage in Matthew's Gospel would be to put on my biblical scholar hat and simply state that this text doesn't apply to me. Ultimately, what I just read is just Matthew writing his gospel to a specific congregation, a specific people, at a specific point in history, about specific issues. What do I have to do with any of that?

But that my friend is the easy way out, that is me grasping straws trying to let us off the hook. But there is no easy way to the kingdom of heaven.

It would be like Noah who has just had this incredible revelation from God to build the Ark, deciding that rather than going through all that work to build an ark that when it starts raining maybe I will just hike up that big mountain over there. "Not as much work to hike up the mountain, as it would be to build an ark longer than a football field and as tall as a four story building. Hiking the mountain would just be a little bit easier.

Wouldn't life be just a bit easier if what we read in the bible had nothing to do with us? It would make my and David's job a heck of a lot easier. But unfortunately, we have to deal with this Gospel and what Jesus says. But the good news is that there is a lifeline. Did anyone catch it?

Let me read to you, Eugene Peterson paraphrase of the openings words of today's Gospel to see if you can catch the good news, the lifeline. Maybe I'll even give you a bit of a hint as I'm reading it. Here goes.

Jesus said, "Knowing the correct password-saying Master, Master,' for instance-isn't going to get you anywhere with me. What is required is serious obedience-doing what the Father wills. (*What is required is serious obedience-doing what the Father wills*) I can see it now – at the Final Judgment thousands strutting up to me saying, "Master, we preached the Message, we bashed the demons, our God-sponsored projects had everyone talking.' And you know what I

am going to say? 'You missed the boat. All you did was use me to make yourselves important. You don't impress me one bit. You're out of here.' That's from Peterson's *The Message*.

"What is required is serious obedience-doing what the Father wills." That's *The Lifeline*. Obedience, doing what God wills for us, for our communities and the world. Now, I didn't say it was it was easy, but it is a lifeline.

At first glance, though I wonder is it really a lifeline, Is not my service at the soup kitchen what God wants? Isn't that important? Isn't that God's will? Good deeds, Aren't good deeds important in the eyes of God? Are they not what God wills for us as Christians?

Dietrich Boenhoeffer commenting on this passage writes, "God will not ask us on that day whether we were good Protestants, but whether we have done his will."

Perhaps the question on that day will not be, did you serve your neighbor at the soup kitchen, but rather did you love your neighbor at the soup kitchen? That makes it just a little bit more difficult doesn't it.

I believe Paul had something to say about this love thing when he wrote to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love. I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body, so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does- the will -of my Father- in heaven." I not certain about this, but maybe just maybe doing the will of God begins and ends with Love. Love of God, Love of neighbor and even loving our enemies.

AMEN

