

Have you ever received a speeding ticket in your life? If you have, did you simply pay for it by sending a check in the mail, or did you go to court? The usual procedure is just mail in the check, don't waste the time to blow part of the day in court and hear the verdict from the judge. You might get a few points knocked off if you go to court, but you'll still have to pay the fine. About 20 years ago, my daughter Carolyn received her second speeding ticket on the road from Bay City, Michigan to Alma College. She always seemed to have a led foot when she drove a car. Her mother also likes speed. Me, I'm called by the two of them, Mr. McGoo. Anyway, It looked like Carolyn's car insurance was going to zoom in price. Someone told her to go to court and maybe the police officer wouldn't show up. If he didn't show up, she would be off the hook. I went along with my daughter that day to court.. And you won't believe it, the cop didn't show. The speeding ticket was dropped. Her insurance didn't go up. We had dodged a bullet.

There is a court appearance coming for all of us, where we cannot excuse ourselves by simply putting the check in the mail. There is a court appearance coming where we will show up whether we really want to or not. There is a court appearance coming where the officer or Judge will definitely be there. And there is a court appearance coming where the verdict will have eternal consequences. The verdict will mean either a happy, joy filled, life in the Villages of Heaven, or a daily torture worse than water-boarding at Guantanamo Bay. The question is: Are you a sheep or are you a goat? Let me tell you on Judgment day you don't want to be called an Old goat. You will want to be on the right side, and the right side is being a sheep. What will distinguish the groups from one another? F.L.U.F. That's Faith, Love, Unpretentiousness, and Fate. It's imperative that we understand what this means so that we don't find ourselves standing in the wrong group bound for hell instead of heaven.

Jesus spoke the words of our text on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Among the many things he taught that day he told his disciples about a day known only to God when the world will come to an end. We'll know that it's the end because Jesus will descend on the clouds with all his holy angels (Matthew 25:31). That will be some sight. I mean think of how overwhelmed the shepherds of Bethlehem were when a choir of angels appeared before them. What will it be like to see the entire army of angels accompany a glorified Jesus?

Afraid you'll miss out on the spectacle? Don't worry about that. Jesus tells us that all the nations will be gathered before him. The prophet Daniel explains that this will be accomplished when all the dead are raised to life (Daniel 12:2). Can you imagine standing in a cemetery when Jesus returns? Would sounds of splintering wood or metal fill the air as people fight their way out of their coffins? Would the smell of fresh earth fill your nostrils as the un-dead dig their way to the surface? Would the exploding of a cremation urn, and a body being formed from that dust cause you to gulp in horror? We don't have all the details of how this resurrection will be accomplished but God assures us that no one will miss their court date before the eternal judge. All dead bodies will be raised.

And who will the judge be? Jesus. Does that surprise you? Some think of Jesus as a perpetual nice guy. But listen to some of his words on Judgment day: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels". There is a certain group of people that is so offensive to Jesus that he won't tolerate their presence on Judgment Day. Instead he'll send them to a place of eternal punishment. What will these people have done that's so offensive to Jesus? It's not so much what they have done as what they have failed to do. Listen to Jesus' assessment: "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you

did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me”. Jesus does not say of this hell-bound group: “You sold your extra oxycontin pills from your recent surgery to a local drug dealer. You cheated on your spouse. You murdered unborn children. You were the biggest gossip at church.” By not mentioning these obvious sins Jesus is teaching us a sobering lesson. Don’t think that everything is OK between God and you just because you haven’t committed any “big” sins. If you’ve ever failed to serve those around you, if you’ve ever thought that your comfort was more important than someone else’s, you’re damned.

Come on, Pastor! Jesus can’t be that strict? Is he really going to send me to hell because I didn’t get off the couch to get my wife a glass of water when she asked for one? Is he really going to send me to hell because I don’t say prayers for the people on our Kneemail list each week? Is he really going to send me to hell because when the Wisconsin Lutheran College choir came to Open Bible to sing, I did not open my home and allow 2 students to stay in our guest bedroom overnight? Is he really going to send me to hell for not bringing canned goods to church for the Wildwood food pantry? And don’t tell me I won’t be in heaven because I sometimes grudgingly serve in the church? Since Jesus is God, he is strict about sin. Failing to cheerfully serve another person even once makes us deserving of his wrath. But you would be correct in your assessment of Christians. We don’t always cheerfully serve others. This is perhaps why Jesus doesn’t compare the two Judgment Day groups to sheep and snakes but to sheep and goats, two animals that look very much alike. So what sets these two groups apart? F.L.U.F. Let’s take a closer look at what this means. My friend, may all of us here today “Be a Sheep with FLUF”!

The first and most important distinction is faith. Those whom Jesus calls sheep are those who have faith in him. Not just faith that a guy named Jesus existed, but faith that he is the only one who can save us from our sins. Think of it like this. If I say: “I have faith in the President.” I don’t mean, “I believe President exists.” I mean, “I think the President can help the United States.” Likewise those who have true faith in Jesus believe that he has saved them from an eternal future in hell when he lived a perfect life and paid for their sins on the cross. They understand that, like decoy flares dropped from a fighter jet to keep a heat-seeking missile from slamming into the plane, Jesus diverted to himself God’s wrath originally meant for sinners. Now those who have saving faith in Jesus will show it in the way they love others. In fact on Judgment Day Jesus will point to this visible love as evidence of invisible faith. Jesus will say to the sheep, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25:34b-36).

One Christian observed that Jesus will not say: “I was sick and you healed me. I was in prison and you freed me” but “I was sick and you cared for me. I was in prison and you came to visit me”. Do you see the comfort here? You don’t have to become a missionary and move to the other side of the world to please God. Nor do you have to perform miracles to get Jesus’ attention. He is pleased when you simply get up off the couch to get your wife a glass of water. He’s delighted when you write out that get well card to someone you know who has been sick or in the hospital. And he won’t forget that you took the time to drive a neighbor to the doctor’s office several times, or ran to the grocery store to pick up some groceries for them when they were recovering from hip or knee replacement surgery. In fact Jesus will point to these things on Judgment Day and say that you did them for him! (Matthew 25:40)

What will our response be? It will be unpretentious. The sheep will answer: “Lord, when

did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?” (Matthew 25:37) Our response will be such because Christians don't keep track of the good things they've done, as if wracking up points for a pizza party in heaven. Christians just naturally do things for others. It is like fruit growing on a fruit tree. Most of the time when we do things for others, we don't even think twice about it.

This is how the goats are different. Because they did not have faith in Jesus as their savior they did not show love to other people. If they did, like the time your unbelieving neighbor watched your dog, while you had to attend a medical emergency, their motive was impure. They did it because they wanted you to think well of them. Or it would make them feel good about helping someone, or because they wanted you to do the same for them some day. They didn't do it to thank Jesus for all he had done for them. The Bible clearly says, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” Unbelievers can't do things that are pleasing to God, because whatever they do is still tainted in sin.

But wait a minute. Don't Christians also do good things with impure motives? Sure. The prophet Isaiah said that even our righteous acts are like filthy rags in God's eyes. That's another reason the sheep's response to Jesus' words of commendation is unpretentious. They are well aware of how often they have failed to live up to God's standard of love for others. As Christians they have done things in a grumpy spirit or to get something from someone. They know that they deserve Jesus' curse, not his blessing and so are humbled that Jesus would mention anything remotely good that they have done. The goats on the other hand are offended that Jesus does not acknowledge any of the “good” things they have done. It just goes to show that their faith is really in themselves and their own goodness. Their goodness, however, doesn't come close to matching the standard of perfection God expects.

Faith, Love, Unpretentiousness. Those are three things that distinguish the sheep from the goats but there is, however, one more thing that sets them apart: Fate. The sheep will enter into an eternal life of happiness with Jesus in heaven. Heaven is going to be an awesome place. I mean if the Garden of Eden was paradise and it only took God six days to make it, think of how much better heaven will be considering God has been working on it since Creation (Matthew 25:34)! I know of at least one way heaven will be better than the Garden of Eden; there will be no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to trip us up. Our joy with Jesus will never be interrupted.

The goats on the other hand will go away to eternal judgment. How bad will that be? Well, consider this: God originally created hell for Satan and his evil angels. Hell must be some terrible place if a powerful spiritual being like Satan is going to be in anguish there forever. God of course doesn't want people to end up there with Satan but they will, not because they're pedophiles, drug dealers, or terrorists, but because they thumbed their nose at Jesus in this life saying: “I don't need you, Jesus. I'm really not that bad. I can stand before God on my own two feet.” To God, that scornful rejection of his Son is as despicable as all the evil Satan has ever engineered and therefore deserving of the same punishment.

F.L.U.F. That's all that separates the sheep from the goats. It doesn't seem like much but it will make an eternal difference. So strengthen your God-given Faith through the study of his Word. Look to Jesus and not yourself for salvation and your Love for others will grow in acts of service. But remain Unpretentious about the good that you do knowing that it never measures up to God's perfect standard. Still, remain confident that your eternal Fate is never in doubt because your future depends on Jesus' righteousness. May Christ keep us as his sheep until he calls us home to enjoy the eternal pastures of heaven. Amen.