

"These Are My Favorite Things." – November 20, 2016
By Wayne J. Schneider – Gloria in excelsis Deo

These Are My Favorite Things

St. Matthew 25:31-40

Each week we pray together, "*Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.*" In this, we are envisioning the present and the 'end times.' In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus is no longer speaking of the physical world but also the heavenly realms. Today's passage feels like St. Matthew is 'summing up' his writing. It reminds me of the "Cliff Notes" I sometimes used in college.

It certainly appears as though this passage needs little critical thought. A casual glance might suggest a definition of a 'good Christian' that could be the definition of a humanitarian too. Here is an outline of things we may do and, like St. Nick, we may keep a list of our good deeds to use as prima facie evidence that we deserve entrance into heaven.

There are two groups of people here with differing perspectives. As we look at our choices, we probably want to be in the first group! We might even wear identically colored T-shirts with pictures of 'sheep' on the front! The first group gave food, water, hospitality, clothing, and medical aid to those in need. They even visited those in prison. The 2nd group *looked the other way* when they saw people in need. It seems simple choice, but there is a twist. Both were perplexed when Jesus says: "*I was the one. It was I you saw hungry, thirsty, etc. I was the one you helped or did not.*"

What is happening here? How had the sheep missed the concept that they were doing these things for Jesus? Did they forget to wear their "**What Would Jesus Do**" bracelets? Was not Jesus' face clearly seen on the people they assisted? Please note verses 37-39 again: "*Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see*

you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick, or in prison and come to you?" They certainly sound perplexed, don't they? Why?

It may be because they enjoy doing their favorite things. What is on your "Favorite Things" list? I know some whose whole day is in shambles if that cannot find a 'fourth player' for their game of 'Bridge.' It doesn't matter if the 'fourth' can't play, because playing is everything and you cannot play Bridge with three.

For me, gardening does not make it to my "Favorite List." I do enjoy flowers, but to me, gardening is copious work for too little reward. My wife is the opposite. She is outside rain or shine digging, pruning, planting. To Sylvia, it isn't work it is love.

Is this the case with our 'people helpers' in our lesson? Do they do it for the love of God or for the love of God in us? There IS a difference that our Gospel lesson emphasizes. They did all they did because they could not do anything else. If we ask them they probably will say, *"Everyone would have done the same."* But, we know **that** to be untrue. More people **look away** than **stay and help**.

It may appear that the sheep are naturally good-hearted, but St. John tells us that as humans we often fail: *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."* (1 John 1:8). Every sheep has a little 'goat' in it for which we need mercy and forgiveness.

Our spiritual life is shaped in part by other "Followers of the Way." That is one of the reasons my mom took me to Sunday School. She did not want the 'secular worldview' to be a partner in my education. We are taught that it is good and pleasant to be together in God's house and that our favorite thing is to walk in the light of Jesus, becoming a blessing for others.

The blessing of living this way is found in St. John 7:38 "*He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of their heart will flow rivers of living water.*" The goats never did find this living, flowing water. They became stagnant, self-contained, and spiritually dead. The sheep go with the Spirit's flow and grow. They are **sensitive** to people's needs; **'see'** them; and **act** lovingly.

So what do we **DO** with Jesus' 'Favorite Thing' list? We can choose to make it our own. When our heart beats with the heart of Jesus, we discover we are a faithful disciple almost without thinking. And, because we are in sync with Jesus, we no longer need to keep a list, because it lives in our heart.

Now, we can understand how the sheep seemed to be unaware, clueless, in their outpouring of Christian kindness. Perhaps we can surrender ourselves to being present with Jesus always; unaware of our ego needs; and desiring to live as "Followers of the Way."

May it be so for each of us. Alleluia. Amen.