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ST PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

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Last Sunday of the Church Year -- November 21-23, 2026
Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen
Sermon Theme: It's Time to Face the Music
Sermon Text: Matthew 25:31-46

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, '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.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 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.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Dear Friends In Christ Jesus,

Have you ever heard the expression "It's time to face the music"? No doubt you experienced it from a parent, a teacher, or maybe an officer of the law. It's usually when we were caught red-handed doing something wrong and then we were forced to face the consequences of our actions. Do you know where that expression came from? The story goes that a man wanted play in the Imperial Orchestra, a prestigious group going on tour to play before the kings, queens, and other important dignitaries. And get this – the man couldn't play a note. But, since he was a person of great wealth and influence, he forced his way in. The conductor had him sit in the third row where he could blend in with the real orchestra. Even though he couldn't read music, he was given a flute. When the concert began, he would raise his instrument, pucker his lips, and move his fingers like he knew what he was doing. He went through the motions of playing but of course never made a sound. This deception went on for some time. Then without warning, a new conductor took over. He told the orchestra that later

that day he would personally audition every member to see how well they could play and those who did not meet his high standards would be immediately dismissed. Can you imagine? One by one they were called upon to perform a solo in his presence and in the presence of the whole orchestra. Soon it was the phony flutist turn. Frantic with worry he tried to make up an excuse, why he couldn't play. But the conductor wouldn't hear of it and insisted the man demonstrate his skill. Of course, It was with shame the man had to finally come clean and confess he was a fake. That day, he had to, you guessed it, "face the music".

My Christian friends, maybe we never did what this man did, fake our way into an orchestra. Have we done something similar? Just maybe we've acted devoutly or friendly in church while treating family, co-workers, or others we don't consider our friends poorly or even cold the rest of the week. Sure, we go to worship where every one sees us, but our worship is often half-hearted or our minds might wander a million miles away. Sound familiar? I hope you realize I'm talking about me and I'm talking about you – all sinners, sinners in the same boat. No big deal, right? I mean, there are sinners worse than us – those who've skipped church, those who take advantage of others, those who lie, cheat, and steal. But, God tells us to compare ourselves only to him, only to His holiness and perfection, see we haven't measured up, and grasp our great need for His forgiveness. I hope you can hear the urgency in my voice right now. Urgency to stop the same old sin. Urgency to turn back to Jesus Christ alone for mercy and grace. Why? It's because God's judgement is coming. The God who made this world is the God who saved this world. He's the God of justice who knows everything and sees everything. And the time is coming soon when that same God will end this world for good. His son Jesus will return when the books will be opened detailing all good and bad deeds. Wait – He's keeping track? Absolutely. At that time, all people of all time, including us, will literally face the music for what we've done and what we've left undone. No face will hide in the crowd. No excuse will be accepted. My Christian friends. Let's get ready now. Let's take God's Word seriously now. And let's carefully review the words of Matthew, chapter 25 in the Great Judgement Chapter of the Bible on this final Saturday/Sunday/Monday of the Church Year. So **Let's Face the Music on Judgement Day.** That's when our Judge will return. Unbelievers will be sent to eternal fires. And finally, believers will join the heavenly choirs.

End times. Judgement. That's been the worship theme the past three weeks in the Christian church. No doubt, it's the beginning of the end. So how do you feel about that? When you think about Judgement Day, is your heart filled with fear, worry, or doubt because we know what we've done? Or does Judgement Day fill you with sense of joy, relief, even eager-anticipation when you think about facing the music? I think you know, only Christian believers can look at Judgement Day and Face the Music positively. Because only those with faith in Christ Jesus will be saved for heaven. Don't face the music alone but with Jesus right by your side.

Because we know what's coming. God tells us ahead of time. God loves us so much to give us the heads-up about Judgement Day and Christ's return. Did you know there are over 1800 references to Christ's *second coming* in the Old Testament and more than

300 in the New Testament? And get this -- for every prophecy in the Bible concerning Jesus birth - his *first* coming, there are 8 prophecies which look forward to his *second coming*! And perhaps no where else are the events of Judgment Day more clearly laid out than in our text for this morning. Jesus says it will all begin this way, ***When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him.*** Yes, the Judge will return. The "Son of Man" Matthew is talking about is, of course Jesus. Jesus, who identified with us as our human brother, and serves us as the Son of God, our conquering King will return. Unexpectedly and without warning, Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. That means: there are no second chances. There are no last minute conversations. There is no purgatory for someone who was good but not good enough. Believe in Christ today. Follow him today.

So how will Jesus, the righteous judge, judge? Listen to this: ***All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left … Then, they (that is the goats on his left) will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous (the sheep on his right) to eternal life.*** God's judgement isn't confusing and it isn't hard. One word that defines Judgement Day is <u>separation</u> – separation of believers from unbelievers. Here, Jesus compares it to a familiar site in the Holy Land, that of a shepherd separating the sheep and from the goats. Many times, Holy Scripture uses sheep to stand for believers who listen to and follow the voice of Jesus, their Good Shepherd. These sheep are placed for all eternity on Jesus' right side, which in Greek culture, was the place of honor – the place of heaven. On the other hand, Jesus uses goats to represent unbelievers – maybe nice people, maybe even our own relatives and friends, but ones who don't believe or follow Christ and places them for all eternity on his left side, the place of dishonor or hell. The point is this: the division is clear and obvious to Jesus. You are either a sheep or a goat, either a believer or unbeliever. There's no middle ground. That's because only Jesus can see the heart. There's no fooling him. It is time to face the music.

It's not so clear to you and me. We can't tell. Honestly, you all look like the sheep of Jesus to me. And I'm sincerely grateful for that fact. Jesus has bled for you on the cross. He's died for you. He's been raised for you. Believe it. Keep your faith. Keep feeding your faith. Don't let the devil take it away from you or your children like he deceitfully has for so many others. So how do you know if you are really a sheep? Let me put it this way: if we only look at ourselves and what we can do to save ourselves, I don't know how any of us can be saved. But, if we only look at Jesus and how He has saved us from our sins, I don't know how any of us can be lost. Look away from Jesus, take your focus off of him, and it's clear, eternal fire is coming. But, look to him and the Bible says: you will join the heavenly choir. No doubt about it. Believe Jesus and His Word.

But, remember: the Christian faith God gives us leads us to do some pretty incredible things, like loving and serving people God brings into our lives. And just think of all the people we get to serve between now and the end of the year. He will bring people we

like and maybe people we may not like very much. Still, we serve them, remembering we serve Jesus. And in Jesus' example, the righteous, the sheep, didn't even realize what a difference they were making for Jesus: ***37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'*** Jesus explained. When they put their faith into action by caring for others, Jesus said: ***40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*** The righteous didn't even do these acts of faith for any personal gain or to be recognized by Jesus. They did them to thank Jesus. And one day, Jesus will recognize every act done in faith, especially for the forgotten ones. May you and I copy their humble attitudes, when others are watching and especially when they aren't.

You might be thinking to yourself: "What difference can I make to other people? Then, remember this, to the world you might be only one person. But, to that one person, you might be the world. Until Judgement Day comes, when we will all face the music of God's judgement, which will be a glorious day, a day where God will make right everything that is wrong and where He will recognizes every good deed done for him, may we not look at it in fear, but in faith. And let's get busy with our Christian mission at St. Paul's – to make disciples of Jesus using the means of grace. To each person we meet this Holiday week, let's be the world for Jesus. Amen.