

Core: Guiding Principles that Make Us Distinct!
Week 5: We Notice the Unnoticeable (Matthew 25:31-46)
"The Least of These"

Summary: When we use our gifts to meet the needs of the "least of these" we are doing it as unto the Lord.

I. Series Recap - Over the last 5 weeks we have been studying and examining our Core values and Guiding principles that make us distinct as a church! Last week Pastor Ed reminded us that we are Fueled by Faith. He imparted some wisdom and challenged us to have walking around faith and to be a church of prayer.

II. Here at TAB we also have a core value that We Notice the Unnoticeable as described in (Matthew 25:40)

A. Today we are going to look at Matthew 25:31-46.

Scripture Summary: In today's scripture we see the people are divided up at judgment day as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep were on the right and the goats on the left. Jesus speaks to those on his right and says, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

Then he goes on to say, "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, 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." The sheep, representing the people who were in right standing with God, were puzzled by this. They said, "When did we ever see you hungry and feed you? When did we ever visit you in prison, when did we ever?" And the Lord answered, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

On the other hand, to those on the left, he said, "You didn't bother to feed me when I was hungry, you didn't invite me in, you didn't look after me when I was sick." They said, "When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or any of these other things?" He answered, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

B. In my studies I have come across many debates about who the "least of these brothers" Jesus is referring to.

- 1. Some say by using the word brothers Jesus is just referring to his followers and the persecution that they (we) as Christians would experience.** The missionary hosting a secret church in a foreign land, the evangelist preaching to anyone in ear reach, regular attending church folks like us. They point to scriptures like (Who are my family....those who are in covenant with me.).
- 2. Other's say "least of them" is not necessarily a "believer" but could be someone who doesn't even know the Lord yet.** This group points to scriptures like Luke 10 and the parable of the Good Samaritan "who is my neighbor?"
- 3. Other's say obviously he is referring to the outcast and marginalized people in society.** The poor, or the homeless person who is living on the street or under a bridge, the person who is living on the fringe of society, the person who is ostracized from community maybe because of crimes they have done, people who can't take care of themselves because of drug problems, disabilities or unemployment.
- 4. Others argue Jesus loved the little kids and that the least of these is all about the little child or person who is abused.** They quote scriptures like Mark 10:14. "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
- 5. Others make the case that the "Least of These" could be anyone who is DIFFERENT FROM ME or YOU.** This would include anyone who is IGNORED or OVERLOOKED. This could be anyone at one time or another.

6. Another one was--the least—meaning the opposite of greatest. So in the ESTIMATION OF MEN. This would be the people who we may be quick to say, “that person doesn’t amount to very much, not worth helping, of no value, you know the type of person that we typically write off.”

Church in my humble opinion if we are not careful, we will spend way too much time defending our points and discussing differences and not enough time finding common ground and doing the thing that we so passionately love to argue about.

C. I want to make the case today that when God speaks, he encompasses ALL. The poor and the poor in spirit. The persecuted Christian and the marginalized. The educated and the illiterate. The hopeful and the hopeless. Jesus led with words and by taking action. He preached and he taught often but he also satisfied the need for bread because he knew that was the pathway to the heart. I believe it was Dr. Ghandi who once said. “There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread.”

1. I think it is important to note that when we are talking about our core Value - noticing the unnoticeable, we are not so much talking about invisible people, we are saying that we at Tab church are committed to seeing and discerning the needs that in our current world and climate can often get overlooked, and once we understand the need then we are committed “We go all out to Clear the path to Jesus.”

2. Matthew 25 is reminding us that Christ, the Good Shepherd is going to return as the final judge, and he will do the separating. Which for us, I believe that means no one should be excluded by us or left out based on our limited ability to cast proper judgement. Only Christ will, not we who will be standing on his right or left.

a. Illustration - I heard the story about a famous battle between baseball's Babes, Babe Pinelli who was a former player turned plate umpire and Babe Ruth the legendary power slugger. One game Babe Pinelli called Babe Ruth out on strikes. Ruth wasn't having it. The crowd began to boo and yell loudly at the empire. Babe Ruth turned and looked at the empire and said, “look there's 40,000 people here who know that last pitch was not a strike it was a ball, you tomato head.” Pinelli could have easily gotten offended and ejected Ruth from the game but instead he Smirked and said, "Maybe so, but my judgment is final and the only one that counts.” You're out!!

b. And so it is with God. Christ alone, the chief cornerstone of our faith, is the final Judge and only one that counts.

2 Peter 3:10 - reminds us that “The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day heaven will pass away with a roaring sound. Everything that makes up the universe will burn and be destroyed. The earth and everything that people have done on it will be exposed.”

Revelation 16:15 - Says “See, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who remains alert and doesn't lose his clothes. He will not have to go naked and let others see his shame.”

Matthew 24:43 - You realize that if a homeowner had known at what time of the night a thief was coming, he would have stayed awake.

D. The main question of the Sheep and Goat parable in Matthew 25:40 for us today is - when the Master returns how will he find us? None of us know the time or the hour. The bible says a father and a son will be working in the field and one will be carried away. In the Old Testament days of Noah people were going out their day to day lives of work and marriages and partying before the flood.

1. The 10 core values that we have at Tab along with our vision and mission, when partnered with prayer and faith, are designed to keep us alert, equipped and prepared for the things that God has for us to do here on earth, as we are all awaiting the master's return.

Illustration 2 - The Cobbler Story: Conrad was a cobbler who had a shoe shop in a tiny village in Europe. He dreamed that the Master (Jesus) would visit him at his little shoe shop. So early in the morning, Conrad got up early and swept, dusted, and got his little shop ready for the visit. He baked some bread and cakes, and he waited with great anticipation for the Master to show up. As the day went by, Conrad saw an old man outside his shop window that had no shoes on his feet, out in the cold. Moved with compassion, he brought the elderly man inside to warm up and gave him shoes for his feet.

As Conrad continued to wait for the Master to come, he heard a knock at the door. With great excitement he ran to the door only to see a little old lady. She had a bundle of sticks and had not eaten in some time. At first, Conrad was mad because it was not the Master. But then he was moved with compassion to bring her into the little shop and gave her something to eat, including the cakes and bread he had made for the Master. After she had finished eating, he carried her sticks for her to the edge of the village and hurried back in fear he'd miss the Master, but as he returned, the Master still was not there.

As the afternoon passed, Conrad waited. Still no Master appeared. And then there was another soft tap at the door. He thought surely this must be the master. It was a little boy. He asked Conrad to help him find his way home. Conrad didn't want to leave, but his compassion led him to help the little boy find his way home. As fast as he could, he rushed back to the shop only to find it undisturbed. No Master to be found. Conrad cried in his heart, "Why is it, Lord, Your feet delay? Did You forget this was the day?" Then in the soft stillness of the little shop, Conrad heard a voice, "Lift up your heart, For I have kept My word. Three times I came to your friendly door, three times My shadow was on your floor."

The Master came as the old man with no shoes, the hungry old lady, and the little lost boy.

Jesus comes to us in those who do need help, are hurting, hungry, thirsty, lost, sick, or locked up in prison. The Body of Christ is to reach out and help just like Conrad did. (Author unknown)

2. He noticed the unnoticeable and when it comes to noticing the unnoticeable, I don't think we are always aware of what our role is in the PRACTICAL everyday life of helping others around us. Sometimes we may have a picture in our mind of who is the "least," but we may not be entirely accurate. There are acts of grace and mercy that we all can do every day and there are times when we ALL fall into the least of these or unnoticeable category.

a. Think of a time when you have been hurting or in need and someone reached out to you or maybe they DIDN'T reach out to you. Remember how you felt? You might think of a time when you needed someone to talk to and someone was there for you, how about when you were worried about something, and someone prayed for you or helped you in some practical way. Or what about the time when you moved to a new city or job and needed some friendship.

b. On Sunday mornings we do an outstanding job greeting and welcoming at the front door of the church but what about the back door? What does our Monday through Saturday welcoming consist of? Who is leaving out of our lives that we should be reaching out to? Who have we seen but we but haven't taken the next step of reaching out to them? Same goes for our life groups, or our home or work. How often do we fail to notice or fail to respond to what we do notice? There is a saying that says, "Out of Sight out of Mind." I believe as followers of Christ we are being challenged in these uncertain times to see things from a fresh perspective. Maybe it's time for us to start scanning the room with our hearts and not just our eyes.

c. Example: When I was a pastor at another church, I received a letter one day from a couple who had moved there from another state. It read: "When my wife and I moved here two years ago, we felt the need to make contact with a local church. We hoped to make new friends. When we went to church we heard good sermons but our hope that we would make REAL CONTACT with our fellow Christians who worshipped in the same pews came to nothing. We often left church as lonely as when we came in."

3. I can hear Jesus saying to the church, "I was a stranger and you took me in--or didn't take me in." The point is anyone can be the "least of these" sooner or later.

E. When have you been hungry, thirsty, a stranger in need of hospitality, in need of clothes, sick and in need of a caregiver, in prison and somebody reached out to you?

1. These six categories pretty well take in the basic areas of all of our lives. The importance of service, when and where service is needed, is not overlooked by the Lord.

Matthew 10:42 says, "if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

2. Such love for others glorifies God by reflecting our love for Him.

F. Personal Testimony about my childhood:

1.

2. But....despite it all,

- Someone saw me.
- Someone saw the slightest budding of a rose peeking out of the cracks of the project concrete.
- Someone realized the potential for life and brought water when I thirsted to survive.
- Someone recognized the need for nourishments and provided soil.
- Someone took the time to carefully uproot me and replant me in an environment to make sure I had room to flourish and grow.
- Someone pruned and groomed me.
- Someone saw me in darkness and provided a light to my pathway out.
- Someone cared.
- Someone Noticed the unnoticeable or often ignored things happening in my life.

Hebrews 6:10 says, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

3. You know sometimes I look at my life now and all of the lives that God has impacted using me and I am so thankful. I am thankful because when I was a child, strangers and family members stepped in and shared love and opened up their home for me and my family in our time of need.

4. I have traveled the world and spent the majority of my adult life sharing the good news and the love of Christ.

a. I thought I was poor and had a rough early childhood until I visited Davao City, Philippines and met the Agdao people. I thought the Agdao community was poor until I visited the slums of Kenya and met Sammy Brakka and other kids at the orphanage.

5. The bible says the people acted surprised when Jesus said, “you fed me, you did this for me.” They asked, “When did we ever do that?” He said, “when you did it for the least of these you were really doing it for me.”

Ephesians 6:7 says, “serve WHOLEHEARTEDLY as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does.”

6. Sometimes we think if we do something for somebody else, we will run short ourselves.

Proverbs 28:27 says, “He who gives to the poor will lack nothing.”

G. Opening Your Door to God: When you invite God into your life, you may be in for some surprises. Anything you do for people; you are REALLY doing for Him. He will bring people across your pathway and opportunities to help--opportunities that may cost you some time and money.

III. Conclusion:

A. In closing I have a challenge for you. In the next 30 days find someone who is in more need than you are. It doesn't matter which scale of need you use. It may be someone who is hungry, someone thirsty, someone who has been stripped bare of outward appearances, who is standing very much alone right now. It could be someone who is in prison right now or someone who is living in a prison of their own making bound up by spiritual or emotional chains that are even stronger than metal prison bars.

1. Find someone who is in more need than you are. It may be a stranger. Welcome that person into your life. It may be someone very different from you. It could be someone in your own family who you are just not connecting with. Ask the Lord to bring someone across your pathway, and in the next 30 days, do something to meet that person's needs.

2. Think about areas of service where you find yourself serving the most naturally and sign up to get involved.

3. Think about areas in which you had the most trouble overcoming and reach back and show someone else the way.

B. Noticing the unnoticeable means we will simply offer deeds of kindness to someone who has been overlooked or ignored or someone who is considered “least” in man's estimation but not in God's.

1. How many will begin to allow your gifts to emerge and begin to use them within the next 30 days to touch someone's life?

2. I would like to end with a final story:

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation.

The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for the rest of his life. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. “I've been thinking,” he said, “I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you

can give me something even more precious: Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone." (Author Unknown).