Devotional Reflection, Wednesday, July 15, 2026
Proper 10, the week of the seventh Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Just Who Is That Needy Stranger?

Key phrases for reflection from today's reading:
34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." 37Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 975)
AM Psalm 38; PM Psalm 119:25-48
Joshua 3:1-13; Rom. 11:25-36; Matt. 25:31-46

David's Reflections

Just who is that needy stranger you encounter? Do you remember these words in the baptismal covenant, "I will seek and serve Christ in all people, loving my neighbor as myself."? That remarkable promise, made in Holy Baptism and reaffirmed several times a year in worship, comes from the Gospel for today, Jesus' third parable in Matthew 25. Jesus says to the merciful, "Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me." You just met Christ in that needy stranger.

In this parable, occurring only in Matthew, the nations are assembled before Jesus in the final judgment like a mixed herd of sheep and goats. Separating sheep and goats presents no challenge to a shepherd, and separating believers from unbelievers will be no challenge to God. Jesus says he will put the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. (Left-handedness was not a good omen in antiquity among Semites, so much so that one name for boys was Benjamin, "son of the right hand," or the favorite son.)

On what basis will this separation be made? A rather remarkable one that has no equal in Scripture for its profundity--Jesus makes love for neighbor THE criterion of separation. All the actions taken by the sheep—feeding, clothing, visiting—express love for neighbor. "Love your neighbor as yourself," Jesus teaches. That needy stranger, bearing Christ's presence, is your neighbor.

In Matthew, love for neighbor recurs as the most valued evidence of faith in Christ. One simply cannot be committed to Christ in faith and live with neglect, alienation, and disarray in human relationships. Every Sunday we pray, as Jesus taught us, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (6:12), thus linking God's forgiveness of our sins with our forgiveness of the sins of others.

The sheep and the goats both will express surprise that they ever had encountered Jesus in the needy stranger. His response, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." To the shocked goats, he will say, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Handing cash to panhandlers does not fulfill the demand to love one's neighbor. Jesus addresses not individuals in this judgment scene but nations. My suggestions below have to do primarily with being part of a community actions, like building a Habitat for Humanity house. Biblical thought began with the corporate and moved to the individual, the reverse of our cultural individualism.

Besides, giving money to the person on the corner at the traffic light may not be the best expression of love for them. Better to engage personally with that individual. Better to keep a snack bag in your car with a bottle of water. Better to

find ways to express your compassion through volunteer ministry or through community action in the parish.

Serving in a ministry to the homeless or in the building of a Habitat House or volunteering in a community ministry are direct ways to seek and serve Christ in others. A church community garden addresses the needs of the needy stranger. It's right there in our baptismal vows, 'I will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving my neighbor as myself." One just never knows where or when he or she might find Christ in need today. How we treat the other person will be how we treat Christ in that other person. Just who IS that needy stranger?

Collect of the Day, Proper 10, the week of the seventh Sunday after Pentecost
O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.*** (BCP, 231)

A Collect for Grace
Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.*** (BCP, 100)

For Our Enemies
O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen***. (BCP, 816)

In the Order of Worship for Evening
Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil,

and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. ***Amen***. (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission
Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. ***Amen.*** (BCP, 101)

Daily Office Gospel, Matthew 25:31-46
31 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." 37Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." 44Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" 45Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*