

STEWARDSHIP WEEK – October 11, 14 & 15, 2006
St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

What did you do? Matthew 25:34-40

What did you do?? Many of us have heard that question from our parents or from a teacher. Usually it was not a compliment, but rather an accusation. We probably had done something wrong and now it was going to be brought out and we were going to have to answer for our wrong and suffer the consequences. That question was not a pleasant one that we wanted to hear.

On Judgment Day we will never hear that question – what did you do? Rather we will hear our King and Judge Jesus tell us all that we did. Now that prospect of having all that we have done revealed could be rather frightening too, couldn’t it. Do you want all your secret sins revealed to the whole human race? Do you want every thought you ever had broadcasted to the whole world? The good news that Jesus reveals to us today is that what will be revealed is only the good that we have done. Because all the evil that we have done, thought and said has been erased by the blood of Jesus Christ and has been forgotten by our God.

Just prior to the beginning of our reading Jesus tells us that when he comes again at the end of time all the people will be gathered before him. He will separate the sheep from the goats, that is, the believers from the unbelievers. Those who trusted in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life will be placed on his right and those who rejected the free forgiveness that God offered to them will be placed on his left. Our reading focuses our attention on what Jesus will say to those who are on his right. As we consider our Lord’s words we learn **WHAT DID YOU DO? I) Jesus Tells Us What We Did.** As we think about what he says let’s also reflect on **II) Why Did We Do This.**

JESUS TELLS US WHAT WE DID

What did we do? Listen to Jesus’ words. “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, 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.” (Vv. 35-36) Jesus is here recounting all the good things that you and I did during our lives. Now have these works saved us? Absolutely not. In fact, you may have noticed the first thing the King does is separate the sheep from the goats. He separates the believers from the unbelievers. What Jesus does do is cite the works that we did as evidence of the faith that he had given us. It’s just as James wrote, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17) Our works are evidence that the faith that God planted in our hearts is active and alive. It’s just as we heard in our second reading for today that we are saved by God’s grace to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

Now do you and I recognize all the good that we are doing or have done? No. In fact, listen to what Jesus recounts will happen on the Judgment, “Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?” (Vv. 37-39) As people who have been delivered from the fear of eternal punishment and separation from God, we are filled with love and we naturally just do good. Just like an apple tree produces apples without our going out into the orchard everyday and shouting at the trees, “Produce apples!”; so a Christian naturally does good without even thinking about it. In the DVD we just viewed we saw many examples of members of this congregation doing good. Everything that you and I do in faith is a good work in the eyes of God. . Taking care of yourself, your physical and spiritual health. Feeding your family. Seeing that your children get a good education.

As we see opportunities to do good, we attempt to help however we are able. In your worship folder today is our proposed work plan for 2007. God has placed before us some wonderful opportunities to do good, to help those in need, to spread his Word of Life here in our community and throughout the world. We are helping teens in our own community through our support of the Watertown Out Reach Recreation Center, the ROC. This year we have at nine months of the year with 3 months remaining surpassed our yearly commitment to that ministry. We support the outreach to the Hispanics in our community. Again our offerings have almost surpassed our yearly commitment for this ministry for 2006. As a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, St. Mark's congregation supports the training of future pastors and teachers for our congregation and for congregations throughout the world. We also support missionaries in India, Africa, China, South America and other areas of the world. This year we have increased our offerings \$16,000 for these ministries as of this date from last year at this time. As a member of the Lakeside Lutheran High School Federation we have contributed \$3,500 more than we did at this time last year. God has been good to us and has moved the members of this congregation to give joyfully and generously for others and the work of our Lord's kingdom. We also need your support of the ongoing ministry of this congregation; we need your continued support and prayers. As of the end of nine months we were \$52,000 short of what we had given in 2005 and as a result the leaders of our congregation have had to borrow \$41,000 to cover our operating expenses thus far for this year. We pray that as you see this need that you continue to support the work that we as a congregation have chosen to do. We have 35 people that are called or hired by the congregation to assist in our ministry. This includes janitors, secretaries, aids, organists, teachers and pastors. It is amazing what God is accomplishing through you the members of St. Mark's. In addition to these people we have dozens and dozens of volunteers who give freely of their time and abilities to assist the ministries of St. Mark's. We have at least one person who donates almost a hundred hours every month to serve their Savior and the members of this congregation. We have others who are here every week practicing in the choirs. We have those who are counseling and assisting those trapped in addictions. We have our pioneer leaders, our Kids for Christ teachers, our ushers and worship service men, our greeters, those who serve on the various boards and committees of this very large congregation, our parish nurses. We have those who phone and encourage people who are not attending worship. We have those who assist at our nursing home services. This adds up to several hundred volunteers who give freely of their time and abilities.

WHY DID WE DO THIS?

Why are we doing all this? When the believers on judgment day ask Jesus, when did we do this? Listen to his answer, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (v. 40) We are doing this for Jesus. Why? Because of all that he has done for us. Every time you and I walk into this building and look at our altar we can't help but remember what Jesus did for us. He gave his life for us. He gave everything so that we might be with him forever. When somebody showers so much love on you that it's almost unbelievable, you naturally respond. You want to do something. You want to say, "Jesus, I love you. I can never repay you for what you have done for me. You have freed me from fear. I don't have to be afraid to die. Because I know that I'm going to spend eternity with you in heaven. I don't have to be afraid that you are going to punish me someday for all the good I have failed to do and all the bad I have done. You, Jesus were punished for me. So what do we do? We give of ourselves, our time, our abilities and our money to spread the good news and to help others in need.

Members of St. Mark's, God has richly blessed us. He continues to open doors to us to proclaim his love and forgiveness to people right here in Watertown and throughout the world. As we see the challenges and opportunities set before us at the conclusion of this year and in 2007, may he open our hearts to respond cheerfully and generously. We are doing all this for him – to make his name great and to bring him honor and praise. Jesus said, "You did it for me."

Amen