

[Slide] *The Homeless Jesus* is a bronze statue created by artist Timothy Schmalz. It depicts Jesus as a homeless person, sleeping on a park bench. Take a closer look.

[Slide] Christ's face and hands are hidden under a blanket, but the nail wounds on his feet reveal his identity. Do you see them? In 2013, *The Homeless Jesus* appeared outside of St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Davidson, North Carolina. One Davidson resident called the police, mistaking the statue for a real person. A lot of people walked by without stopping. Still others went way out of their way to avoid the statue—thinking it was a real, living person.

How do *we* respond to *The Homeless Jesus*? That's the question from today's parable in Matthew 25. That's *the* question of our lives. How do we respond to *The Homeless Jesus*, the hungry Jesus, the hurting Jesus? How do we respond to the Jesus who so desperately needs us?

[Slide] Here's the key to unlocking the parable. **Jesus is the source of mercy. Jesus shows the course of mercy.** What's mercy? Mercy is undeserved kindness. **Jesus is the source of mercy. Jesus shows the course of mercy.** Mercy is the key to understanding the parable in Matthew 25. We begin with this—Jesus is the source of mercy.

[Slide] **The King descends.** "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the *throne* of glory." (Mt 25:31) Mercy sent Jesus to a manger. Mercy sent Jesus to teach. Mercy sent Jesus to heal broken lives. Mercy will send Jesus to sit on the throne of glory. But you know, don't you, that there was another throne before the throne of glory?

[Slide] Here it is. The Romans placed what they called a titulus above Christ's head on the cross. The titulus included these words, "*Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum*. Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Do you see? The Romans turned the cross into a mock throne for what they took to be a mock king and mock Messiah who had a mock message and who led a mock movement with mock followers. That's why they gave him a mock crown—made of thorns. For Rome? The cross is a throne of mockery. For us? The cross is the throne of mercy.

Christ's throne of mercy means we have forgiveness for every sin, direction at every turn, light for every dark day and hope for every deep sigh of despair.

On the last Day, the King descends. [Slide] **The King Delivers.** "The King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are *blessed* my Father, *inherit* the kingdom prepared *for you* before the foundation of the world.'" (Mt 25:34)

Blessed. That's another word for mercy. Inherit. That's another word for mercy. "For you." That's another expression for mercy. *For you—not by you. For me—not by me.* Mercy!

When did this plan go into effect? The King decided to deliver mercy before the foundation of the world. Overflowing mercy. Unlimited mercy. Marvelous and miraculous mercy. The King delivers mercy through His means of mercy—the Gospel and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

I'm not the source of mercy. You're not the source of mercy. Our job isn't the source of mercy. Sports aren't the source of mercy. Government isn't the source of mercy. **Jesus is the source of mercy.** That's the first part of our parable. The second part of our parable? **Jesus shows the course of mercy.** Some will follow the course. Others won't.

That's why—[Slide] **The King divides** humanity into two kinds of people. "Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Mt 25:32) The King divides sheep people from goat people—believers from unbelievers. This is a major theme in Matthew's Gospel. There's a broad way and a narrow way; the house on the rock and on the house on the sand; the wheat and the tares; the wise virgins and the foolish virgins; the sheep people and the goat people.

[Slide] There are, finally, just two kinds of people. We get that! I mean, really! There are cat people and there are dog people. There are people who sleep with the window open and people who sleep with the window shut—and they're usually married to each other. There are carefully-balance-the-checkbook-every-month people and shut-the-checkbook-down-every-two-years-and-start-over people. And there are sheep people and there are goat people.

[Slide] Sheep people know the source of mercy and they follow the course of mercy. "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (Mt 25:35–36) What's the course of mercy? *IATOP*, "It's about the other person." It's not about me. *IATOP*, "*It's about the other person.*" Jesus loves me, this I know. Jesus loves me, this I *show*. That's sheep people.

[Slide] Goat people? Jesus loves me, this I know. Jesus loves me, I *won't* show. "Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it

to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Mt 25:44–45) What do we call this? A case of mistaken identity!

[Slide] I heard about a CNN cameraman in Los Angeles who called the local airport to charter a flight. They told him a twin-engine plane would be waiting for him. Arriving at the airport, he spotted a plane warming up, jumped in with his bag and shouted, “Let’s go!” The pilot taxied out, swung the plane into the wind and took off. Once in the air, the cameraman instructed the pilot, “Fly over the valley and make low passes so I can get pictures of the fires on the hillsides.” “Why?” asked the pilot. “Because I’m a cameraman for CNN and I need some close up shots.” The pilot was silent for a moment. Finally, he stammered, “So, what you’re telling me, is...you’re not my flight instructor?”

Do you want to know the worst case scenario of mistaken identity? The goat people took needy people, lonely people, lost people, hungry people, thirsty people, hurting people to be just ... people. *Just people!*

How did that happen? Mercy gets marginalized by more. *Mercy gets marginalized by a thirst for more.* Obsessed with getting more and more and more, people become just people. But people aren’t just people! The King descends, delivers, divides.

[Slide] **The King disguises.** “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40) The King disguises his identity in children; in our neighbors; in high school students; in broken and battered women; in the lost people in our world. The King disguises himself in the least of these my brothers and sisters.

[Slide] I once heard about an elderly lady who got pulled over for speeding. She was going 70 in a 40-mile-per-hour zone. The policeman asked her, “Ma’am, why were you going so fast?” She said, “Sir, the sign back there said 70.” “But ma’am,” he replied, “That wasn’t the speed limit sign. That was the highway number sign. This is highway 70.” “Oh my goodness,” she gasped, “I’m sure glad you didn’t see me back there on highway 129!” Numbers are important. Ask a highway patrolman or a mortgage banker or a math teacher.

*Numbers are important*, including the numbers we write on our checks to First Lutheran Church. That’s because our financial generosity helps who? People. Just people. You think? Think again.

[Slide] Our financial generosity helps *The Homeless Jesus*, the hungry Jesus, the thirsty Jesus, the lonely Jesus, the hurting Jesus. Don’t believe me? Then believe Jesus who says, “In as much as you did it for one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” Amen.