

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

For 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:35–36



Growing up in a small Texas town in the 1980s and '90s, I was surrounded by versions of Christianity that placed great emphasis on God's coming judgment. To a surprising degree, my first encounters with Christians involved people who were trying to "save me" from the fires of hell and who were obsessed with the impending rapture. Needless to say, I found this experience both fascinating and strange.

It is comforting—indeed, healing—then to reflect on Matthew 25:31–46 decades later. In this passage, Jesus offers us a different image of God's coming judgment. Jesus describes a time when God separated the sheep from the goats. Critically, however, the criteria for judgment center on how we treated God's "least of

these" in our earthly life. This text on judgment specifically names the treatment of groups still incredibly vulnerable today: the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and the imprisoned.

Jesus is notably silent on so many of the issues that inflamed my schoolmates' imaginations, yet he spoke eloquently about serving the most vulnerable in our midst. "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" (Matthew 25:40).

Today's readings

Psalm 19:7–14 | Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18

Matthew 25:31–46

What does it mean to you that in a text on God's judgment, Jesus identifies with "the least of these"?