



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**A Vision to Reach Beyond Ourselves in Mission**

**Text: Matthew 25:31-45**

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Here is a question. We all like to listen to music but do you know where the recording industry began?

If you don't know the answer to that question, consider this. Last Sunday night the Oscars were on. Do you know where the motion picture industry began?

Hint. They both started in the same place.

The place was West Orange, New Jersey and they were both started at the Thomas Edison Laboratory that was there. The place was pretty much closed down in 1931 when Thomas Edison died. It is now a museum. I've been there several times in my life and one thought I've had while there is that at one time amazing things happened there----but they don't any more. It's just a museum. People can see what used to be there, but it's no longer the great place it once was.

That happens to churches too.

There are a lot of churches that have pretty much become museums. Many of them are large, magnificent structures with marble altars and beautiful stained glass windows and virtually no congregations left. If you go anywhere near the churches you'll see that they are locked up tighter than a drum and open on Sunday mornings. But no one from the neighborhoods has ever set foot inside these churches. As a result, many of these churches are little more than museums. Once there were amazing things that took place, but they are no longer the places they once were.

This opening ourselves up to the neighborhoods around us is reaching beyond ourselves in mission.

Reaching beyond ourselves in mission is central to who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. It is following Jesus as closely as we ever can. The scripture reading for today says it all.

Matthew 25 is a startling passage because Jesus is pointing something out. When we do for others, we do for Jesus.

This is an incredible image. When we do for others, we do for Jesus.

When we work in the Soup Kitchen and cook food to feed the poor in our community, we are feeding Jesus.

When we hand an impoverished person a meal, we are handing Jesus a meal.

When we work on the homes of people who cannot afford it, we are pounding nails into Jesus' house.

When we clean up after a disaster, we clean up Jesus' property.

When we give out a blanket in our Clothes Closet and that person pulls it over themselves on a cold night to get warm, we are warming Jesus.

The child who walks into school with clothes we have given her family it is Jesus walking into that school.

*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, 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.'*

When we reach beyond ourselves in mission, we truly are reaching out to Jesus in such a profound way.

Secondly, reaching beyond ourselves in mission needs to be done with a purity of heart and a purity of motive.

Sometimes people who go on mission trips, often out of the country, come away disappointed because the people from that country didn't seem to appreciate the efforts of the people on the mission trip a great deal. But doing outreach is not looking to make people appreciate us. It is about us serving God.

Let me ask you a question. Do you like affirmation? Do you like being told that you are awesome? Do you like being affirmed in your talent, your skill, or your time?

I have been there and done that. I'd like to say that my motives were pure for each and every thing I have ever done. I'd love to say that everything I do I do for the love of God and the love of people and that I do not need affirmation or praise.

I'd love to say these things but I would not be telling the truth. I, like most people, like to be affirmed and even praised when I do well. It's a lot more ego affirming when people walk out saying, "Good sermon," than it is, "What on earth were you talking about?" It's a lot more fun preaching when people are looking at me and appear to be engaged than it is when everyone looks like they are about to fall asleep.

About 20 years ago I was preaching a sermon in my church in Pennsylvania and as I was gazing out in the congregation it looked like everyone was totally bored. I mean, TOTALLY BORED. Then I realized that I was even bored and I was the preacher. A quick “Amen” soon followed. Funny how happy people looked when I said that one word!

But we don't do things for affirmation, or praise, or even for ourselves. We don't do things because people are going to delight in us or what we did, but because we are serving God.

Here's the thing. It doesn't matter what people think about us. If we are serving God, that is enough. If we travel 2000 miles and build a house and no one says 'thank you,' it doesn't matter. If we are serving God, that is enough. We need to do things for the right reasons and have a purity of heart.

Lastly, in terms of reaching beyond ourselves, we need to actually do it.

Have you ever worked in our Soup Kitchen? If you haven't, why not?

Have you ever worked in the Clothes Closet or ever donated clothing? If you haven't, why not?

Have you ever given to Thanksgiving baskets or purchased Christmas presents for Operation Santa Claus or delivered gifts? If you haven't, why not?

Maybe you are doing things that we don't know about. Tell us. Maybe others would like to do it too.

Maybe you just haven't gotten around to it. Fine. Get around to it.

Do you ever find yourself thinking we are doing enough? If you have, where did you ever get such an idea????? We can never do enough and we always need to be seeking to be there for God's people. Always.

We are given a great blessing when we have the privilege to serve God's people. If you do a great deal, great. You are richly blessed. If you haven't found yourself doing much, don't miss the opportunity. It will be one of the greatest blessings of your life.

So....don't just sit there!!! Go serve God's people!