

# BELPRES CHURCH

**Sermon Title: Least of These.**

**Annie Duncan**

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**Scripture:** Matthew 25:35-40

<sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> 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.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?'

<sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?'

<sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

<sup>40</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

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**Discussion Questions:**

The scripture for this morning comes from Matthew 25, verses 35 through 40. Follow along on your device or your Bible, however. "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. 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 as stranger and invite you in? Or needing clothes and clothes you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go and visit you? The king will reply, truly, I tell you whatever you did, for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

So Jesus, we long to worship you. To worship you, we live. We live to worship you. So take these next few minutes and speak to our hearts Holy Spirit. Nudge us, convict us, challenge us, encourage us, do all that you need to do Holy Spirit to get us looking a little bit more like you this morning. Amen. Well, when my husband and I were on our honeymoon and I promise you, this is a church appropriate story. When we were on our honeymoon, he got sick in the middle of the night and he was coughing and coughing. And we were maybe like two nights into our honeymoon and he wasn't sleeping, he was making a lot of noise and so I wasn't sleeping. So I did what any good new bride would do. And I leaned over to the end table and I grabbed my earplugs and I put one in. And then as I went to put the other ear plug in, I remembered the vows that we had just said to each other just a few days before, the ones that go in sickness and in health.

And so instead of putting that second ear plug in, which I really wanted to do because I was tired, I grabbed the keys to the rental car and I Googled the nearest drug store. And I went and I got some cough medicine for my husband. Now I tell you this story, not because I'm a great wife, I'm a work in progress. But because I knew in that moment exactly what it would have felt

like to live for myself. And I convicted myself, I'm like, oh, here I am, this new wife, and I think that our vows mean that we're supposed to do life together. I think our vows mean that we're supposed to support each other in good times and hard, in sickness and in health. And so that was why I went to the drug store. It's a vow that I'm still learning each year that we're married.

And in the scripture that we just read, I think that's a little bit of what Jesus is getting at. He's like, hey, I know that you know how to live for yourself, but I'm asking that you do something a little bit more than that. Don't just live for yourself, but engage those around you and especially the least of these. So in that list of things where Jesus says I was thirsty, I was hungry, I was sick, I was without clothes, I was in prison. Jesus says, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." Did you catch that? Like, that's kind of a big mic drop moment. That when we engage the least of these it's as if we're engaging Jesus. That's how closely Jesus ties himself to these people. That's how close they are to his heart.

And Jesus knows us pretty well, right? He knows at least me pretty well. He knows that I have a tendency to be selfish. And he knows that Annie living for herself, isn't life to the fullest that Jesus would have me live. And when Jesus says live for me, he's showing us that we can't live for Jesus without caring for what he cares about. And in the Book of Matthew, this sermon that Jesus is giving here in Matthew 25. It's the last sermon that he gives before he goes to the cross. So these are his final words. Like these are really important words. And a few chapters before this, Jesus declares the greatest commandment where he says, "Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is just a few chapters before the passage we're looking at it.

And then here in Matthew 25, it's as if Jesus is putting context to what loving God and what loving your neighbor looks like. Because when we engage and we treat people the way that Jesus would engage and treat people, we are simultaneously loving God and our neighbor. And we experience Jesus more. Now could you imagine if the passage read something like this. I was hungry so I ate something. I was thirsty so I got some water. I was a stranger so I invited myself to a party. I needed clothes so I shopped on Amazon. I was sick so I went to the doctor. I think for a lot of us, like that sounds normal, right? They're like, yeah, I've done every single one of those things Annie and that's okay. Like we are a fairly self-sufficient society. There's nothing wrong with that. That's not Jesus' point here. Jesus' point is that it should matter to us when we do see somebody that's thirsty, that's hungry, that's oppressed. And it should matter to the point where we stop, we listen, we engage and we do something about it.

Jesus calls us to live a life for him. And you can't live for Jesus without engaging the least of these. So what does that look like? What is engaging and caring for the least of these look like? First, it's going to look different for all of us. It's going to look different for all of us because we're all uniquely different and have different gifts that God has given us. A few weeks ago, I was on a road trip with two of my friends and to pass the time we would ask each other questions. And one question that we asked was what hobbies do you like? I know, we're really an exciting crew. So my friend Jordan, she said she likes to paint in her spare time and like journal and do watercolor. And I said that I like to do mixed media, paint with some bees wax and do lots of mixed media stuff. You can ask me about it. It's really fun.

And then my friend Becky answered and she went last. We were really glad after she responded that she went last because she said something like this. She said, I really like to get involved in my community. I like to get involved with my community, with my family. I have a heart to see systems of injustice broken. And so me and my family, we work to end those

cycles of injustice in our neighborhood and where we live. And then she just kept on going on. I like to help this. I like to help this. And she finally got done and my friend, Jordan and I were like, Becky, those aren't hobbies. Like that's who you are. That's just who you are to your core. Like Becky, God wants our lives to overflow with love and justice and mercy and compassion. Jesus says, "Those are the marks of his kingdom." It's evidence that the spirit of God is at work within you when you notice and engage the least of these.

And as followers of Jesus, we have this choice, right? To respond to the unsettling realities of our day, by withdrawing and ignoring them, or to respond by noticing them, engaging them and figuring out what to do with some of them. And I say some of them, because we're not Jesus, we're not going to meet every single need that comes our way. Jesus doesn't ask us to do that. But he does say, would you notice? Would you take time? Would you engage some of them? Because if somebody were sitting outside of BelPres today with a sign that said, I'm thirsty. That person wouldn't need all 5,000 of us to bring them a glass of water, but that person would need a few of us to rally together, to get to know them, know their story and bring them a few cups of water and get them rehydrated.

A few weeks ago, my neighbor Sue, who's a single mom. She texted me and she said, "Tell Victor," that's my husband. She said, "Tell Victor, thanks for getting the branches off my roof." And I was like, oh, I had no idea he did that. But she must've seen him in the yard and asked him for help. And she couldn't text him because she doesn't have his number, but she does have my number. So why didn't Sue text me and ask me to help her get the branches off the roof? Right? Well, because Sue knows better. Like Sue sees Victor in the yard. She sees him cleaning out the gutters, up and down ladders. She doesn't see me doing those things. So Victor was the logical choice to help her get the branches off the roof. Now God has made me and Victor very different. We are going to engage the least of these in different ways. And that's okay because God's heart for the least of these is wide and vast. There are so many opportunities for his people to engage.

This weekend, a few of my friends and then a few of their friends helped get a house ready for an Afghan refugee family that is resettling here this week. They saw the crisis that's happening in Afghanistan and they looked for ways to respond. And I asked one of my friends that showed up this weekend, I asked her why she was helping out. And this is what she said. She said, "It's a no brainer. Why wouldn't we want to help them? There's people in need who are going through incredible trauma and all we need to do is show up. It's really a no brainer to me. It's not a complicated, complex answer because I just think it's exactly what Jesus would do." And then she said, "The past year has been really hard on all of us. And to see people step up in a way that's more than just talk is really important to me and it gives me hope."

God's heart breaks for what's happening with his people in Afghanistan. And God's people's heart break as well and are spurred to action. And that's what I saw this weekend with all my friends, helping out at this home. And if you too are wondering how maybe you can get involved and help, maybe some of the refugees that are coming here with this crisis that's going on in Afghanistan, a great organization to check out is World Relief. They're the organization that BelPres works closely with. And World Relief is just a great organization that helps churches and people have a tangible next step when things like this happen.

So when you hear Jesus' words in this passage. "For I was hungry, I was thirsty. I was a stranger. I needed clothes. I was sick. I was in prison." How does your heart respond? Who in your life or community or world comes to your mind? And right now, as people are coming to all of our minds, we have different people and communities coming to our minds. And I would

ask you to then pray and ask God, okay, God, then what's my next step? In the stories that I just shared from getting involved in your community to break systems of injustice, to helping a single mom get branches off of her roof, to helping an Afghan refugee family get settled into their new home. God's heart for the least of these is wide and vast. So there's going to be lots of different ways for God's people to respond.

So what is caring for the least of these look like? It's going to look different for all of us. And second, it's going to look like Jesus. It's going to look like Jesus, because this is so closely tied to his heart. Caring for the least of these isn't a box to be checked on our Christianity to do list. Gross. Matthew 25 isn't a passage of scripture that tells us how we get into the kingdom of heaven. But it's a passage of scripture that tells us how the kingdom of heaven gets into us, when we respond, when we see the world, as Jesus would see the world. Jesus modeled this all over the place in the gospels. He listened to people, he cared for people, he noticed people that were unnoticeable, he healed them, he fed them, he set people free. And the closer that we get in our relationship with Jesus, the more we're going to rub up against the things that he cared about and those things that he cared about, we're going to start caring about. And that begins with caring for those in need, caring for the least of these.

I told this story before, but I think it's been about seven years. So maybe it'll be new for some of you. But when I was in seminary, I interned at a small church in Seattle and on one of my very first Sundays there, I was mingling with some people, hanging out, meeting some new faces. And this couple came over to me and they said, "Hey, we need help." And I was like, yes, I am intern Annie. I am feeling useful. I will help. What can I do? And so they explained, they said, "We've got this RV, it's got a flat tire. We need to get it fixed because we need to get to Utah as soon as possible." I was like, okay. So I started to kind of brainstorm with them.

Okay, I know a couple of people, there's a car mechanic that attends here. Maybe we can get him to help you. His shop is closed on a Sunday, but we'll figure this out. I'm in it with you people, but it kept on coming up in conversation how like they were just so adamant, like they had to get to Utah, had to get to Utah. So I asked them like, "What's so important in Utah? Like, why do you need to get to Utah?" And this is what they said. They said, "Well, we are both vampires and we don't want to be vampires anymore. So we need to go find the vampire in Utah that bit us, and then get her to un-bite us so the spell will be broken." I was like, what? I started scanning the room. I was like, oh, this is a church intern hazing. Like this is rude. But as I was scanning the room, no one was looking at me like laughing in the corner, like ha ha, no one was.

And all that I could see was this couple in front of me that were still asking me for help. Not just this couple, but these two vampires, right? Weirdest situation I've ever been in. But as I'm sitting there scrambling, like looking for the senior pastor to pawn this couple off too, as I'm sitting there, this thought comes into my mind. They don't need to go to Utah. And that thought was not my own because all I was doing was scrambling trying to get out of this situation. And as soon as that thought came into my mind, they don't need to go to Utah. Something like this came out of my mouth as I was talking to this couple. I said, those words, "Hey, you don't need to go to Utah actually. I can pray for you right now because I believe in Jesus and Jesus is way more powerful than any vampire I've ever met so he can break whatever spell you're under. You don't need to go to Utah, think of all the gas you'll save."

And so I prayed for them and it was one of the weirdest prayers I've ever prayed, but it was so filled with power and authority because it wasn't me. Like Jesus was giving me the words to say. And in that moment I went from being freaked out, thinking I just want to get out of here to

seeing this couple and seeing that all that they needed was somebody to notice them and somebody to take them seriously. So I prayed with them. They went and they got some coffee and they were mingling for a little bit. And then they came back to me before they left. And they said, "Thank you so much for praying with us." They said, "We've been to several of their churches and gotten kicked out." So thanks for not doing that. And that's what breaks me because Annie in the flesh wanted to kick them out. Like I was freaked out. But then Jesus nudged me and then I wasn't freaked out anymore. It was like I had lenses on to see the situation as if Jesus would have seen it.

So didn't look like Annie, it looked a little bit like Jesus. And that's what happens. God's heart for the least of these and God's heart for those that need him is so big that he interrupted my Annie craziness thoughts with, hey, here's some words that you can say. He interrupted that and nudged me and gave me words. And I'm like way off my notes now. That's what the Holy Spirit does though. The holy spirit is constantly nudging us, guiding us, guiding us. And when we're in a situation where we don't know what to do, like holy moly, there's two vampires standing in front of me, God's there and God's got this. God doesn't freak out, right? When we respond to God's nudges to the least of these, it not only helps them, but it also changes us. Because in that moment, I was able to see the situation as Jesus.

So when your heart breaks for those in your community or world, a great prayer to pray is okay, Holy Spirit, what do I do? What do you want me to do? What's my next step? And know that the Holy Spirit is going to give you a next step because when we pray that kind of prayer and we surrender to God, it's going to look like Jesus. So what does caring for the least of these look like? It's going to look different for all of us, because we've all got different gifts and strengths. It's going to look like Jesus, because this is so closely tied to his heart. And third, it's going to take margin. It's going to take some margin.

This is the part in the sermon where it may be an off ramp because I'm going to start talking about our time and our money, but don't go off. Don't go off. Keep on, stay on with me for like two minutes. Going back to the greatest commandment, love God and love our neighbor. We can't do these things if we don't have margin in our lives. So two aspects of margin, time and money. First time, how can we spend time with God, be in God's presence, worship with God, pray to God, how can we do that if our lives are so jam packed with other things?

And second, how can we love our neighbor if when our neighbor asks, hey, can you help me with the branches that are on my roof, if we say to them, oh yeah, I'll pencil you in mid December, right? We need margin in how we spend our time. And second, we need margin in how we spend our money. We can't respond generously to those that the Holy Spirit may nudge us with or call us to respond to if we don't have margin with our finances, right?

I was recently talking with a family from this church, and the wife told me that they live off of a 100K a year and then have agreed to give everything else that they make away to organizations and people that need it. Now they are a six person, family living in the Bellevue area. So in order to live off 100K a year, you know that this takes some strategy and very intentional decisions. But to hear her talk about it, she's not like gritting her teeth talking about how hard this is. She has so much freedom. They're having so much fun as a family because they know like they're making an impact in some things that are really important to them. And they believe really important to Jesus. They aren't living up to their means, but they're living below their means so that they can give away some of their means. And they're having so much fun doing it. Pastor Bryan Loritts says that Christianity isn't a have to, it's a get to, and this family is modeling margin not in a half to way, but in a get to it way.

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**Discussion Questions:**

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Read Matthew 25:35-40 and answer the below questions with your friends, family or All In small group.

**Ice Breaker Question:**

- What is something that sparks your curiosity and want to learn more about?

**Opening Questions:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions** – Together read Matthew 25:35-40 and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions** – Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following

- How do you know when the Holy Spirit is nudging you?
- Who are the strangers among us that we sometimes overlook?

**Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.