

KITCHEN COUNTER MUSINGS OF REV. MARK

June 29, 2025

Last Friday night my wife and I went out to dinner with her cousin and husband who were in town from Arizona. We took them out for our "regular" Friday ritual--Manana Cafe in Groton and Mystic Drawbridge Ice Cream. While we don't go every Friday, we go often enough that people ask where we've been when we don't show up. (It's kind of like the question I ask, usually to myself, when I haven't seen you sitting in your normal spot in the pew for awhile.)

We eat late, not my choice, and we usually make it to Mystic Drawbridge a few minutes before closing time. I normally order the coquito ice cream (try it!) and we sit out on the bench on the water's edge for a few moments. This particular night, a warm with a gentle breeze blowing with good company by my side, I was enjoying a wonderful close to a late evening.

While watching two gentlemen fishing from a pontoon near the bridge, and listening to my wife and her cousin talk about the umpteenth person I never knew, my phone rang. It was 10:54. The number was from Massachusetts. Since I was on-call at the hospital I assumed that it was one of the nurses calling me about an emergency at either Lawrence and Memorial or Westerly Hospital. I answered the phone,

"Hello, this is Mark."

It wasn't the hospital. You may not know this but our church doesn't get many phone calls so the phones are forwarded to me. A few spammers, a few legitimate calls, but none so close to midnight.

"Hello, Pastor Mark. Does your church have emergency funds to help those in need?"

"We don't."

Well, we don't have a dedicated fund, and maybe we should, but I wasn't in the mood to have my night interrupted with what might be, or might not, be a genuine need. It's one of my least favorite parts of being a pastor, listening to stories of woe from people who often play on the emotions of church people. Legitimate or not I said,

"Do you know what time it is? Can you call me back in the morning, please!"

"It can't wait till then, please!"

"Then I'm sorry, I can't help you, right now."

And I hung up the phone. It was my first call of that type at the Road Church. I went back to my ice cream and my family, more annoyed than I had a right to be.

I woke up Saturday morning thinking about the encounter feeling sad, not for the first time about situations like this. Jesus' words from **Matthew 25:45** were ringing in my ears, **"When you have not done it to the least of these, you have not done it unto me."** I can't meet every need, and people know how to play on emotions, but I can't get the thought out of my head: what if it was Jesus calling?

I called the number back Saturday morning. I didn't leave a message. The voicemail had no name, only "The subscriber (!) is not available." I sighed and went on with my morning, offering a silent prayer asking for forgiveness if I had failed Jesus...again.

I don't write this to make anyone feel guilty, I can do that for all of us. But I do think it's helpful to read **Matthew 25:31-46** every once in a while. (I've asked Cindy Cline to paste it to the bottom of this reflection.) Why? Because we categorize people in so many categories. What if the first category we used was, "might be Jesus."

I probably couldn't have helped the caller that late on a Friday night. But if I thought it might be Jesus calling, I might have been tender instead of annoyed.

I'm going to try again.

Grace and Peace,

Mark

Matthew 25:31-46

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ 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.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "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.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."