

The Least of These

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 59] This is the day. This is the day. That the Lord has made. Will you pray with me? Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this day and every day that you bless us with.

As we enter into your house, we ask, Father, that you would fill us with your spirit, that you would be with us here, and that everything that we would do would honor and glorify you, Heavenly Father.

Bless our worship, bless Pastor Scott as he preaches, and bless our music and our worshipping to you. For it is in Jesus' mighty name that we pray, amen.

Amen. Amen. And we're going to start out with a song, and as you'll see on the wall, we aren't letting the congregation sing yet, but I'm going to encourage you to clap along, to hum along, to dance along, whatever way you can worship and bring honor and glory to our Father.

Let's sing together.

[4 : 33] Let's sing together.

Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together. Let's sing together.

Let's sing together. A traveler is far away from all He sends his cold Quietly sinks into the back row Made of their judgmental blanché Tells him that his senses are better out of the road But if we are the body Quietly is our preaching Quietly is his healing Quietly is his good teaching And if we are the body Why are tears weak going

Quietly is his love I'm showing them there is a way Jesus, bring much too high a price For us to pick him to choose your God And if we are the body But if we are the body Why are tears arms reaching?

Why are tears hands sealing? Why are tears proceeding? And if we are the body Why are tears leaving the wind?

[7 : 08] Jesus is the way Jesus is the way Jesus is the way Jesus is the way You may be seated And good morning again friends My name is Scott I'm part of the pastoral team Pastoral team here at Pendleton Center And Niagara Falls First United Methodist Churches It is a joy to be with you And I'm sure it is a joy to be here together Whether we are together here in person Or we are together in spirit online

As we come today We'd ask those of you who are watching with us To take a moment to pause And fill out your friendship card online It asks you for some basic contact information You can also leave prayer concerns or blessings And our prayer team And others will be in prayer with and for you We also want to make sure That folks are aware That we are very close to launching Our small group ministries Life groups as we will call them This is an opportunity for folks To go deeper into their relationship with God And with each other in the congregation If you want to find out more about that Feel free to call the office Or email the office And we can get you more information about that This is an exciting way to grow in faith I hope more folks will explore The possibility of life groups And what we also want to make sure you do Is if you're watching online today You can also download the children's activity sheet

If you have some young people watching with you They will have the opportunity to do some fun things While we are worshiping God together So we're coming now to a time of thinking about our offerings And we will have a video that talks about a mission moment But we also want to make sure that everyone is aware That you can give online By going to pendletonchurch.org and give You can also give in person By putting your offering in one of the boxes Throughout the sanctuary Or you can simply mail in your gift to the church With all that having been said Let's take a moment and watch this particular video Hi, my name is Dee Finch And I'm the pastor at Seneca Street United Methodist Church Down on Seneca Street in South Buffalo I have the wonderful opportunity to serve the community there And have followed Brian and Cheryl Rotach Who have been at that church for 23 years

It's a joy to serve in the city I'm not a city girl I grew up in Hamburg But I grew up in a church that helped me understand How we are called to help the least and the lost And to love As the church we host worship on Sunday afternoon At 4 o'clock But we appreciate churches like Pendleton Center Who come down to serve a hot meal every Sunday About 60 to 70 people come to receive a fellowship, community, and a good meal Our church provides a place for people to come Where people know them by name or we get to know them quickly Sometimes I think we're a MASH unit Where we're there to help the souls And pick up people off the ground Or as people get out of jail Or whatever situation they are in People are coming needing love Needing support Needing things But we couldn't do it without churches like Pendleton Center And other churches in our district and conference 100% of the income needs to be brought in from the outside

People give an offering on Sunday morning That's usually about \$10 Unless we have guests sitting with us But people bring their quarters, nickels, dimes, pennies Folded up dollar bills Because they do want to give something back We're busy doing weddings and memorial services And worship as a spiritual place that the church is But it really is about healing, giving people second chances And we just thank the churches who are supporting us And the individuals who support us Thank you for all that you are and all that you are yet to become And we're grateful that we have the opportunity to serve many At Seneca Street And also to provide an opportunity for everyone to come down and visit us The center of Time of Friends We're grateful that it is the end of bills on our front

[12 : 25] Let's Universum food To help you Amen. Amen.

Praise Him, Almighty, Heavenly Host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen. Amen.

Would you pray with me? Almighty God, maker of all things and giver of every good gift, we stand in awe of the ways in which you pour yourself out for us.

Lord, please accept this gift back to you as it goes to the honor and glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. As we come now to our time of praying together, where we open our hearts and be going out on behalf of those we love, I had a concern shared with me before worship started, where Ron Elman, his grandson, Eric, has been diagnosed with COVID.

[14 : 48] And he is quite sick, but he is still at home at this time. And so we want to make sure we keep Eric and his family in our prayers. With that said, I'm sure there are many joys and concerns on our hearts.

Let's open ourselves and go to God together. Loving and gracious Father, we come grateful for the opportunity to gather together as church family and as your people.

As we come this morning, we are grateful for all that you have given us the gift to see, whether that is warm eyes over a mask as we walk in together, whether it is leaves beginning to turn as we change seasons, whether it is a beautiful sunset, whether it is simply the joy of watching a game with friends.

There are many ways in which you have gifted us with experience that we can enjoy as we see together. But Lord, as we come together today, we know that there is much in our world that we see that challenges us, that breaks our hearts, that weighs heavy on our spirits, so for those like Eric who are battling COVID, for those workers who are putting themselves on the front lines doing the hard work of giving care, for those who are responding to emergencies, for those who are struggling as the economy changes around us, as people are struggling to get back on their feet, for those in the streets striving for justice, for our leaders who have to make such difficult choices, for fires that are ravaging our brothers and sisters on the West Coast, for storms swirling in the Gulf and in the ocean.

Lord, there is so much that we see happening in our world. Lord, we know that all things are in your control.

[17 : 18] We know that nothing is beyond your power. And so we come on behalf of those whom we love, those we know and those we do not.

Brothers and sisters in our congregation, brothers and sisters in Christ, and brothers and sisters across the world who need your touch today, who need to hear your voice in places where they are struggling, who need your guidance, who need your comfort, who need clarity about what their next steps might be, who need strength as they make their way forward in difficult circumstances.

And Lord, we, your people, again commit ourselves to doing the work. However you would call us forward, Lord, here we are, use us.

Let us indeed be the body of Christ as we have sung and as we have discussed, that we might work your will wherever you would have us go in the world.

Lord, in all these things, we humble ourselves before you because we know it is you who has saved us, not we ourselves. We know it is your spirit at work in us that gives us the ability to smile, to see the things you lay before us, as well as to endure whatever challenges come.

[18 : 51] So Lord, with our hearts open, we give you thanks and lay these petitions at your feet in the name of your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

Amen. Good morning.

Our scripture reading this morning is from the book of Matthew, chapter 25, verses 31 through 46. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

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. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

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.

[20 : 03] 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 a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to 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.

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. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. 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.

[21 : 16] 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?

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

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I love you, I love you, I love you.

I love you. I love you. In my own little world it hardly ever rains. I've never gone hungry, always felt safe. I got some money in my pocket, shoes on my feet.

In my own little world, population, me. I try to stay awake during Sunday morning church I throw a 20 in the plate but I never give till it hurts And I turn off the news when I don't like what I see Yeah, it's easy to do when it's population mean What if there's a bigger picture?

[22 : 48] What if I'm missing out? What if there's a greater purpose? I could be living right now Outside my own little world Stopped at a red light, looked out my window I saw cardboard signs that held this homeless widow And just above that sign was the face of a human I thought to myself, God, what have I been doing?

So I rolled down the window and I looked her in the eye Oh, how many times have I just passed her by? I gave her some money that I drove on through And my own little world reached population too What if there's a bigger picture?

What if I'm missing out? What if there's a greater purpose? That I could be living right now Outside my own little world Ooh, my own little world Ooh Ooh Woah Woah Woah Woah Woah Woah Yeah Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah Gotta break my heart for what breaks yours Give me open hands and open doors Put your light in my eyes and let me see That my own little world is not about me

What if there's a bigger picture? What if I miss it now? What if there's a greater purpose? That I could be living right now I don't wanna miss what matters I wanna be reaching out Show me the greater purpose So I can start living right now Outside my own little world Ooh, my own little world Oh, my own little world Ooh, ooh, ooh Would you pray with me?

Almighty and gracious God, we come before you today with our hearts open. We have sung praises, we have prayed together, we have heard your word, Lord, and now we are looking for a seed, a seed that you would plant in us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name.

[25 : 57] Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So for the next few weeks, you are going to hear Pastor Sherry, Kathy, and myself talking about this idea of outside my own little world.

Outside my own little world. And so today, I wanna start from a particular place. And I wanna talk about this notion of being invisible.

So I wanna ask a question to start. How many Harry Potter fans do I have out here? Do we have some folk who like Harry Potter? Now, for those of you who don't know what Harry Potter is, it's this great little story about wizards and witches.

Now, before we think we're doing something inappropriate, that it's a child story, it's really a coming-of-age story, where people with the ability to do magic learn life lessons, and of course, there's a bad guy, and eventually we all save the day.

But in these stories, they get a bunch of little trinkets and toys. They get all kinds of fun little things to play with. And one of those is called the Cloak of Invisibility.

[27 : 12] And in that, you can imagine, right? You get this cloak that you can wrap around yourself, and it renders you invisible to everyone else. And of course, the three primary characters, Harry, Hermione, and Ron, get to sneak around and do all kinds of fun things.

And of course, from our point of view, this is a cool thing, right? Because they get to sneak in and do stuff, and of course, eventually save the day. Now, I didn't realize this until I started preparing this message, but cloaks of invisibility actually show up in a lot of other stories, too.

Like, there's different myths where they have this idea about being able to render yourself invisible. Now, I don't know what kind of trouble you would get in if you had the ability to make yourself invisible.

I'm out here, and something tells me I've got a few mischievous folk who might have a little fun with that idea. I know I'd probably get myself in all kinds of trouble, too, if I could do it. But the thing about being invisible, as long as you're in control of it, it sounds like a good idea.

Problem is, is I'm willing to bet not only have most of us thought about what we might do that could be fun if we were invisible, some of us have probably flipped that around and know what it's like to feel invisible to the world.

[28 : 30] And if you've ever felt invisible to the world, you know that that doesn't feel so good. Now, why we might feel invisible can come from a variety of places.

You might feel invisible because you think, perhaps, no one sees the real you. No one knows your whole story. No one knows what's really going on inside of you, even though outside everything may look okay.

And that can make you feel invisible to the world. Now, some folks feel invisible to the world even though they just simply are ignored.

That life goes on around them, and it's very easy for folks to step over them, walk past them, look right through.

Now, from that point of view, being invisible, not so much fun. The challenge for us is if we are who we believe ourselves to be in the body of Christ and in our Lord and Savior Jesus, how is anyone made to feel invisible?

[29 : 50] When you hear today's scripture passage, this idea of being invisible is not something Jesus discusses directly, but he does talk about what we, as his disciples, should be able to see.

And our challenge is, do we see some invisible people who might be right in front of you? So, let's take a minute and go back to the text, because I think we can see how Jesus hits this point.

And if we start at verse 31, Jesus is, of course, talking about the future judgment. When he talks about when the Son of Man comes in his glory.

And then, at that point, he separates the sheep from the goats. This was a familiar image to the people he was speaking to at that time, because, when you were raising those animals, you had to separate sheep and goats because they wouldn't sleep well together.

And so, you had to put the goats in one place and the sheep in another. So, it would have struck a pretty familiar chord with them, but it also drives home what's going to happen from the body of the view.

[31 : 06] So, now, we are talking about people. And then, Jesus starts to break this down in a way that feels far too relatable.

because, if you start with me at verse 34, it says, 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. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

for 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.

[32 : 11] 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 a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe 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.

When did we see? It's a penetrating question. Because, you know, as we live our lives today, we have the luxury of what we see.

some of us have been able to create a world in which we only get to see the things that make us feel comfortable.

[33 : 21] We get to see the things that make us feel good, things that affirm the way we look at the world, things that tell us where we are is the right place to be. The problem is is that as we've built that world, we are not the only people in God's world.

And if we have the luxury of being only able to see what we want to see or what we hope to see or what we choose to see, then there might be those around us who become invisible.

and Jesus is challenging us on this. How would those of us who claim love, how would those of us who claim his name, how would those of us who know his power allow people to become invisible?

See, that's the hard part for us, right? because it's easy to hear this and start to think, well, I can just do nice stuff and then I'm good. But it's deeper than that.

See, church, this isn't about works-based salvation. In other words, you don't get to go to heaven because you do nice things. That's not how this works. This is actually salvation-based work, not works-based salvation.

[34 : 54] When we say it's salvation-based work, it's because we know what it's like to have been seen by Jesus. Those of us who were lost in our own sin, those of us who know that we were outside of what God hopes for the world, we know that we weren't doing the right thing from his standpoint and we were lost in something.

Whether it was a sin that is pretty obvious, like an addiction or sin where we were doing things we know we shouldn't have done, what's clear is that we were not walking in God's will and because we were not walking in God's will and his way, God saw us.

He came to us and he didn't leave us where we were. He took care of what we couldn't take care of for ourselves and now we know the benefit of having been healed, having been saved, having been lifted up by him, having been welcomed to the table, and our lives have been changed.

And because we know this to be true, now that we have received it, Jesus reminds what about those still outside?

What about those who are still struggling like you once were?

[36 : 33] And Jesus doesn't just tell us to go see them, Jesus is very clear, love has legs on it, love has hands to it. In other words, don't just see the hungry, feed the hungry.

Don't just see the thirsty, give them something to drink. Don't just see the sick, care for the sick.

Love has legs on it. And so we have to do the things that make a difference, because that is how those who are lost, those who feel invisible to the world, know they are not invisible.

Know that their lives are indeed important to not only God, but to us. And we might be the hands through which a heart is reached.

that's Jesus' hope. And his challenge to us in this passage is that if you saw me, he says, me, Jesus of Nazareth, if you saw me in the street, you're telling me you love me so much you wouldn't leave me there.

[37 : 57] You're telling me you love me so much that you wouldn't let me be hungry. you're telling me you love me so much that you wouldn't leave me outside in the rain. But he tells us if you would do that for me, if you've done it of my brothers and sisters, you've done it to me.

Friends, don't hear this as guilt. I don't think Jesus is trying to make us feel bad. What I do think Jesus is trying to do is call us to remember who we have said we are.

Because we know that outside of our own little worlds, the ones we have built, the ones where we are the most safe and the most comfortable, there are those who need exactly what we have discovered.

there are those who need exactly what we have found. Jesus himself. Real love. Love that doesn't just say nice things, but actually does the things that make a difference for someone.

love. Because if we who know what it is like to feel invisible and then know what it is like to be seen, let us not leave anyone outside our little worlds where we know there are those who feel invisible.

[39 : 52] We are the body of Christ and we will say yes to what Jesus has called us to be and called us to do.

Amen and amen. Almighty and gracious God, we thank you so much for the gift of this time in your word. We thank you for the ways you work inside us.

We thank you for the gift of being able to see. Help us to see not only the things that are easy for us to see, but the things that are hard, the things that make us uncomfortable, the things that go outside our world.

Amen. The sacrament of communion is one of God's great gifts to us.

It reminds us of something tangible in ways in which we can experience and remember who God is. So as we come to this time, I want to invite you to share that which is in your heart, to make yourself a gift that God has freely given.

[41 : 32] The Lord be with you. Lift up your hearts. and give us thanks to the Lord, our God. It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth.

You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. God, you formed in us, yourself, and when we turned away and your loved failed, your loved remained steadfast.

You delivered us from captivity and made covenant to be our sovereign God. God, you spoke to us through your prophets who looked for that day when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, when nations shall not lift up sword against nations, and neither shall they learn war anymore.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join in their unending hymn. Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your son, Jesus Christ.

[43 : 12] Your spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the Catholics and the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.

He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit.

At his ascension, you exalted him to sit and reign with you at your right hand. And on the night in which he gave himself up for us, Jesus took bread, he gave thanks to you, he broke that bread, and he said, take and eat, for this is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, he gave it to his disciples, and he said, drink from this, all of you.

This is the blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for the forgiveness of sins. do this as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

[44 : 46] And so, in remembrance of these, your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught us. Our Father, who art now, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

[46 : 02] Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, and the power, and the glory, and the glory. Amen. Amen. As you know, you will receive the elements on your way out, and you will be able to take the body and blood together.

Now we will hear a closing song from our praise band as we continue our time of worship. please stand if you would, and hum along and worship along with us.

help us accept each other as Christ accepted us.

Teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace. Be present, Lord, among us, and bring us to believe.

[47 : 32] We are ourselves accepted, and meant to love and live. Lord, for today's encounters, with all who are in need, who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and grant.

We need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on.

Lord, free us, make us one.

And so as you go into the world this week, know that God has given you the eyes to see beyond the comfortable spaces, to see into those places where we are far less comfortable.

Grant that ask that he would ask you to see not only with your eyes but with your heart and that the call to respond with love would be loud and clear, that we may indeed be the body of Christ for those who need us.

[49 : 15] And now in the name of God, our Creator and King, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our Counselor and our Sustainer.

May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[51 : 15] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.