THE SCRIPTURE:

“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. 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.’ 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.”

(Matthew 25:31–46)

THE MEDITATION:

This is the last teaching of Jesus that Matthew records before the Last Supper, Judas’s betrayal, and Jesus’s condemnation to die upon the cross. It is fitting that Jesus told his disciples to fix their eyes upon the coming Kingdom of God knowing that they would be challenged by the tragic events they would endure over the coming days. Jesus begins his discussion of the Kingdom of God in Matthew 25 with the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids followed by the Parable of the Talents before he gets to the separation of the sheep and the goats at the Final Judgment. The Parable of the Bridesmaids teaches us to be ready for the
Kingdom. The Parable of the Talents teaches us to act for the Kingdom. But it is in Jesus’s comparison of the sheep and the goats that we are taught how to act for the Kingdom.

Now when we look at this list of things Jesus said his followers would do, we tend to notice and take care of material necessities by offering food, clothing, shelter to those in need—and it is appropriate that we should do so. Yet, it is easy to overlook those things which we are also called to offer that cost nothing of monetary value, but that require the precious gifts of our time and our presence instead.

Did we welcome the stranger? Did we visit those who were isolated because they were sick or in prison? In our busy materially oriented society, it is easy to overlook that giving the lonely our faces might be the most important gift we can give. This is because human beings have been hard-wired to feel pain when we are isolated and alone, whereas we experience comfort and peace when we’re in the empathetic presence of others. As it turns out, when someone experiences the emotionally distressing aspect of pain—whether it’s caused by broken bones or broken hearts—it is due to the activation of the anterior cingulate cortex found in the frontal top center of our brains. However, when we give our face to someone who is suffering, and we listen empathetically—so the person we are with can see we care as our facial expressions match their own—we are helping the release of powerful natural opioids in the frontal lobe of the sufferer which comforts them and causes their pain to lessen. This is an incredible power that God has given to each and every one of us—the power of our face to ease the suffering of others—and we are called to use that gift to help usher in the Kingdom of God.

**REFLECTION:**
As we turn our hearts toward Holy Week and remember Jesus’s three-year ministry that ended with the cross and resurrection, we should ask ourselves:

- Why did Jesus come? What was his mission?

Scripture tells us that Jesus came to heal a broken world, and his mission was to usher in the Kingdom of God. Jesus did this by coming down from heaven to ease our suffering by giving us his face. And his life. And by calling each of us into the Kingdom of God by name: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1).

- Beloved, do you realize that Jesus has called you by name?

God calls each of us by name to redeem us, to comfort us, and to empower us. Each of us has a calling in the Kingdom of God that no one else can fulfill. Our mission is as unique to each of us as our name, our DNA, or our life experience.

As we anticipate the coming return of Jesus into his Kingdom, we remember to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and that the Kingdom of God begins in and through us.

- Which is easier for you to offer to others — material help or personal time?

- Can you recall a time when someone visited with you during a difficult trial? How did it make you feel? If it helped you feel better, what was special about it?
If Jesus were sitting down with you at this moment, what ways – big or small – do you think he might encourage you to share more personal face-to-face time with others?

PRAYER:
Loving Lord, we ask you to help each one of us to discern our role as you usher in the Kingdom of God. We lift up all those who suffer and ask you to help put us in the right time and place to ease their pain. Lord, we give you permission to make us the people you call us to be. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Victoria Campbell, a John Wesley Fellow, has a doctorate in chemistry as well as a doctorate in theology and her research is in the area of God and the problem of pain. Her book, *The Problem of Animal Pain*, is currently in the publication process with Cambridge Elements. She is an ordained Deacon in the Global Methodist Church and is active with her local Rescue America phone bank which helps survivors leave human trafficking exploitation (https://rescueamerica.ngo/). Vicki enjoys gardening and cooking, is married to John, and is the mother of their three young adult children.