

The tradition of the kings and leaders of Israel being the shepherds of the people was strong and important from the time of David and continued to be important long after the kings had as little to do with real sheep as most of us have today. In the passage from Ezekiel the LORD promises to be the shepherd to rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered. He will feed them on good pasture, bind up the injured, and feed them with justice. Then the LORD says, "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them."

The promise is good government that takes care of the people, and the return of Davidic kingship. Israel believed that their best times were during the kingship of David. Those were the times when the people were most faithful to the LORD and when the nation had plenty for all. There was justice and righteousness. Whether that was true or not, it was believed. It was a time of rapid expansion of the nation with growing wealth, but the archeological evidence does not support faithfulness to the LORD. Instead it shows widespread admixture of pagan fertility religion mixed with worship of the LORD. In any case, by the time of Ezekiel the kingship of David was the recognized ideal and so the people are promised a return to David's rule. God always meets us where we are so he chose a descendant of David as his holy King.

The Lesson from Ephesians gives us a vision of this holy shepherd. We read: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation ..., so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, ... God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things..."

The Gospel Lesson gives us a different side of Christ's dominion, judgment. "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. " This is the king as judge, giving justice, deciding who has done well and who has not. "He will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" To those on the left he says, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

The issue that divides the two groups is how they have dealt with people in need. "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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." The charge against those on the left are that they did not do these things. It's important to notice that both groups are surprised. The sheep are surprised that they had done these good deeds.

These were people who were not trying to earn a place in the Kingdom, but people who cared about other people and who did something. When we consider all the need around us it is easy to be overwhelmed. There are so many hungry. There are so many homeless. There are so many who need clothing. There are so many sick and in prison. We could spend all our time and all our money and never help everyone. But Christ isn't asking us to spend all our time and all our money to help everyone. He is asking us to be compassionate and to help where we can.

The people on the left are surprised they had failed to help. They always intended to help. It was just that they were always concentrating on their own needs. They didn't want to risk running out and not having any left for themselves so they never got around to being generous.

Today we celebrate Christ the King. As a nation we began by fighting to not have a king, and that is still a significant part of our national psyche. Our struggle to contain the Corona Virus has been seriously hampered because a significant number of us don't want to be told what to do even when it's for our own good. How well do we do with really acknowledging Christ as our King?

It is easy to give praise and glory, but do we recognize Christ has authority over all things? Most of all, do we recognize and accept the standards of Christ's Kingdom where kindness and compassion are basic, where we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the sick and prisoners, and we do it not because we have to but because that is who we are in Jesus our Lord. Jesus wants us to be the Gospel.

In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Preface of the Lord's Day, or of Baptism

Proper 29, Year A
Sunday Closest to November 23

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 100
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 (NRSV)

For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice. Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Psalm 100

- 1 Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; * serve the LORD with gladness and come before his presence with a song.
- 2 Know this: The LORD himself is God; * he himself has made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
- 3 Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise; * give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
- 4 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; * and his faithfulness endures from age to age.

Or

Psalm 95:1-7a

- 1 Come, let us sing to the LORD; * let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving * and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
- 3 For the LORD is a great God, * and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, * and the heights of the hills are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it, * and his hands have molded the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, * and kneel before the LORD our Maker.
- 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

Ephesians 1:15-23 (NRSV)

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46 (NRSV)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

