

Christ the King Sunday, November 22, 2020

Announcements: This Sunday we will try and have a live service via Zoom at 10:15. This is will be our first attempt so please be patient. The information on how to join via computer is in another email note from Brenda.

For those who do not use computers you can join us by your phone and listen to the service.

To do so, call 1-312-626-6799 and when asked for Meeting ID enter 845 6812 7103 and then enter the Passcode 179076 You may have to wait until you are admitted.

Introduction

On this final Sunday of the church year our gospel is Jesus' great story of judgment. In the end, the faithful are those who served Christ by ministering to those who are poor, hungry, naked, sick, or estranged. In the first reading God is the shepherd who seeks the lost, weak, and injured and feeds them with justice. We gather this day to celebrate the reign of Christ and his victory over death, yet we await the consummation of all things yet to come. Acknowledging Christ as our merciful ruler, we go forth that his reign may be known in our loving words and deeds.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, in whose image we are made, who claims us and calls us beloved. Amen.

Holy One, we confess that we are not awake for you. We are not faithful in using your gifts. We forget the least of our siblings. We do not see your beautiful image in one another. We are infected by sin that divides your beloved community. Open our hearts to your coming, open our eyes to see you in our neighbor, open our hands to serve your creation. Amen.

Beloved, we are God's children, and Jesus, our Beloved, opens the door to us. Through Jesus you are forgiven, by Jesus you are welcome, in Jesus you are called to rejoice! Let us live in the promises prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Amen.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Prayer of the Day

O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Because Israel's kings proved to be bad shepherds, Ezekiel declares that the LORD will assume the role of shepherd in Israel. The LORD will also set over them a shepherd-messiah, "my servant David," who will feed and care for the people.

¹¹Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹²As 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. ¹³I 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. ¹⁴I 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. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶I 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.

²⁰Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²²I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Psalms 95:1-7a

¹Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.

²**Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to the LORD with psalms.**

³For you, LORD, are a great God, and a great ruler above all gods.

⁴**In your hand are the caverns of the earth; the heights of the hills are also yours.**

⁵The sea is yours, for you made it, and your hands have molded the dry land.

⁶Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

^{7a}For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep of God's hand.

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

In this passage, God is praised for revealing ultimate divine power in raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrected, exalted Christ is Lord of both the church and the entire universe, now and in the age to come.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I 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, ¹⁸so 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, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God 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, ²¹far 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. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus compares himself to a king who moves among his subjects to see how he is treated: what is done for the least of those who belong to his family is truly done for him.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ³¹“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. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then 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; ³⁵for 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, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then 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? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And 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.’ ⁴¹Then 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; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I 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.’ ⁴⁴Then 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?’ ⁴⁵Then 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.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Message: “Goats, Sheep, or Good Goats”

There it is, the answer to the question, “Who is going to eternal punishment?” and, “Who is going to eternal life.” It seems simple and very straight forward. If you feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, visit the imprisoned, your reward is eternal life. But if you ignore these least of God's people your reward is eternal punishment. It is as simple as that. But, did you notice that neither group knew that they were ignoring or serving the king? Sometimes it's hard to know when we are sheep or goats.

The sheep were Christ like in serving their neighbor but didn't know it. Their hearts were one with God. But the goats were not Christ like. They could not see Jesus in other people. And you can hear the thoughts of both groups, “When did we see the King?”

If the goats had known that the king was hungry, of course we would have fed the king! All they saw were hungry people. But if they had known it was the king, they would have fed him. You can hear their minds calculating, “What will it cost us to help hungry people? What will we get out of it? If we don't get anything out of it why should we help?”

The sheep don't calculate. If someone is hungry, they feed them because their hearts are in tune with the Son of God. The king of heaven and earth lives in their hearts. There is always room for one more at their table and for them there is no judgment. They had already entered into the joy of the king. Whereas, the goats live in fear of not having enough to go around. They live in fear of the stranger, the needy and the sick. Goats live in fear of being taken advantage of and so they

calculate every cost. But if they had known it was the King that needed their help they would have helped because they would have calculated a reward.

So, what is their reward for not helping? Living in fear. So, what is the reward for the sheep? Living in the kingdom of heaven. It is as simple as that. But how do we get to that point of not living in fear? How do we become sheep?

First comes the love of God through Christ who calls to us to be loved and forgiven. When we are filled with this grace, trust and faith begins to grow in us. And when we are loved, we love.

Let me tell you a little story. When I first became a pastor and performed my first wedding, I learned a unique lesson. A lesson that I already knew as perpetrator and victim. (*Oh yes, I am a goat and a sheep and sometimes a victim.*) After the wedding was over and everyone had left, I had to put things back in order so that all would be ready for the next morning's Sunday Worship. There wasn't that much to do because the families had done a good job of picking up after themselves; they were good sheep. It had already been a long day and after this last chore it would be time to go home. But when I walked out the front door of the church, I was surprised to find numerous cigarette butts lying on the ground right in front of the church; they were the goats. I knew the custodian would be coming to do the real cleaning after the wedding, but I didn't know if picking up cigarette butts was part of her job description. Even though there were only a few, it would take time and it is a degrading to bend over to pick up something that has been in somebody else's mouth. On top of that knowing that those who threw them there on the ground gave no thought what they did. That is when I pictured our custodian doing this undignified job at the end of her day. This person who had a name, a family, tired feet, and did this job with great dignity deserved more respect than this? Then I thought about the impoverished souls who threw their cigarette butts on the ground. They could not see what they were doing to one tired custodian who would pick them up. (*It was also at that moment that would determine if I was a sheep or a goat.*)

When we do things like this there is no love given. We may not know the custodians of the world but we know that they exist; someone has to clean up. How do we love the ones we never see, those who can never punish nor reward the deeds we choose to do? At the end of our least act, and ever affected by that act, stands another human being. Always. And that human was made in the image of God. When we allow ourselves to be loved by God, divine love arises and acts in us and through us. So then: how do we love God? By how we see others and love our neighbor, families, spouses, bosses, workers, strangers, widows, orphans, and foreigners looking for work in our land? For all of these are the children of God. Created in the image of God. When we ignore these, we can make their lives miserable and they become the "least of these."

It is our souls that are impacted most by these unconscious acts for in them dwell our true nature. Our souls are more accurately represented by the unconscious act than by acts we plan and pay for. In the former dwells our truer nature. Our love of the Lord is proclaimed by our care for the faceless, for those who lack the authority to demand our service, but who shall receive the benefit of it. At the end of every act there stands the Master, picking up cigarette butts.

Let me close with this. It is called, "The Moment of Dawn." It is a story from the Jewish tradition called the Talmud.

A Rabbi asks his students, "How do you know the first moment of dawn has arrived?" After a great silence, one pipes up, "When you can tell the difference between a sheep and a dog." The Rabbi shakes his head no. Another offers, "When you can tell the difference between a fig tree and an olive tree." Again, the Rabbi shakes his head no. There are no other answers. The Rabbi circles their silence and walks between them, "You know the first moment of dawn has arrived when you look into the eyes of another human being and see yourself.

(The Book Of Awakening, by Mark Nepo)

Prayers of Intercession

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

Sovereign of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Bring peace to every place where conflict rages. Grant opportunities for ending divisions among us and usher in your reign of unity and reconciliation. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Bring healing to all in need especially Conrad Gallmeyer and Marie Hruska. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Thank you for saints now departed who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to the sick. Inspire us by their example, that we may see your presence in those in need around us. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 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, forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Upcoming Commemorations

Tuesday, November 17, 2020 - Elizabeth of Hungary, renewer of society, died 1231

Born in Hungary, Elizabeth was betrothed to the son of the Landgrave of Thuringia, and at age four was taken to be raised with him at the Wartburg Castle. Ten years later they were married. She was very generous to the poor, and after her husband's death she lived in cruel hardship until her own death at age twenty-four.

Wednesday, November 25, 2020 - Isaac Watts, hymnwriter, died 1748

Thought by many to be the greatest hymnwriter in the English language, Watts as a youth was critical of the quality of the metrical psalter of the time. He wrote about 600 hymns—many based on the psalms, but others that are not.