

November 22, 2020 (Proper 29, Reign of Christ, Year A)

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹² 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.

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ 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.

Ezekiel is writing to the exiles being held in Babylon. They have seen, not just bad management or sheer incompetence, but utter callousness from their leaders (whom Ezekiel condemns vigorously in vv.1-10, which precede the lectionary reading.) Ezekiel harkens back to Psalm 23, and describes the Lord GOD as a good and just shepherd, one who will watch over the sheep as they were the shepherd's own (which they are, by the way).

The Lord GOD will seek out the chosen people as a shepherd searches for missing sheep; the search will extend everywhere and anywhere the sheep (people) might be.

The Lord GOD will gather the people into their own land, and will care for them wherever they may be found

The Lord GOD in person will care for and protect the people. As Professor Margaret Odell points out, this means not only feed them with food, but also with justice; care and justice are, she puts it, "two sides of the same coin," so care without justice—for example, feeding the poor without trying to eliminate the cause of their poverty—is only doing part of the job. "The fat and the strong" (v.16)

<p>²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, ²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.</p> <p>²³ I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.</p>	<p>are those who have pushed the poor away from the feed trough and prevented them from eating—those in power who enriched themselves at the expense of the poor and oppressed—and will get their “just desserts”—justice rendered against them.</p> <p>The Lord GOD’s own self shall judge between the fat sheep—the oppressors, who bullied the poor and pushed them away from the feed—and the lean sheep—the oppressed, who were denied justice. The Lord GOD will gather the people together, protect them, and give them both care and justice.</p> <p>How do you connect care and justice? How do you strengthen that connection? Many acts of care and/or justice are controversial—for instance, Affirmative Action, which gives preference in education and hiring to minorities. How do you feel about Affirmative Action? How would Ezekiel feel? What would you tell a critic who complains that depriving innocent (?) white people of opportunities isn’t fair to them?</p>
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Psalm 100

<p>¹ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.</p> <p>² Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing.</p> <p>³ Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.</p> <p>⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.</p>	<p>The hundredth Psalm is one of the most famous. It has been set to music (“Old 100th”) that other hymns (for instance, the prayer “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”) use.</p> <p>The KJV translates the first part as “It is He who hath made us, and not we ourselves;” how often do we need to be reminded of that?</p>
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Give thanks to him, bless his name.	
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⁵ For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.	
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Psalm 95:1-7a

¹ O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!	Praise the LORD.
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² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
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⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
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⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

⁶ O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
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Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.	
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Is your faith worth talking about?

¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

²⁰ 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, ²¹ 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.

²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul prays for the Ephesian church to be given the divine wisdom to know God's hope, God's riches (mostly, if not totally, invisible to the outward eye), and the greatness of God's power.

God put Christ in charge of everything— isn't it nice to have an "in" with the top boss?

Matthew 25:31-46

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.

³² 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, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right

Part of Jesus' "farewell sermon" to his disciples, the parable of the sheep and the goats, the last of four "judgment parables" in Matthew (three in chapter 25), is quite familiar—at least the first part is.

hand and the goats at the left.

³⁴ 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; ³⁵ 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,

³⁶ 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.'

³⁷ 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? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'

⁴⁰ 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.'

⁴¹ 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; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ 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.'

⁴⁴ 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?'

⁴⁵ 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.' ⁴⁶ And

When have you touched Christ—by doing some of the things listed, or perhaps others Matthew didn't mention? Can you remember such an occasion? If you don't remember, it might be because you forgot about it (or considered it of little value) as soon as you did it, you did it unknowingly just by living your life, or you didn't do it at all.

Here's the part that many people forget about—the place where Jesus condemns those who didn't do anything. Is he saying that we must serve others if we follow him? How does this tie in with KC's “inward” and “outward” journeys?

Same answer, but different result.

They haven't given relief, so they've given punishment, and they get punishment in return.

these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."