Christ, the True King

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 22 November 2026

Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24 • Matthew 25:31-46



Ezekiel 34:11-16,20-24: 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.

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.

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.

Matthew 25:31-46: Jesus said, '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 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,[a] 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 these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today is known as the feast of Christ the King. We call Christ the King because he is so much greater than any earthly kings. The early Israelites had kings; in fact, they asked God, through the prophet Samuel, for a king to rule over them. At that time, God reminded the people what a human king would do:

> This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses … He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. … He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day. (1 Samuel 8:11-18)

But the people rejected God's counsel and Samuel's urging them not to reject their true king, their God in heaven. They wanted a king who would march in front of their armies and lead them to victory over their warring neighbours. They wanted a king like all the other peoples around them had; they did not realise the great blessing of having God as their own king. Probably they did not understand. And so God gave them a king, who was identified through Samuel: Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. And Saul did indeed do those things which God had told the Israelites he would do, for earthly kings take tribute and demand service of their subjects and a share of all their crops and goods. And sometimes they turn out to be all too human and lead their people into trouble or conflict or disaster, as Saul ultimately did. He was replaced by David, whose great line of descent eventually led to the birth of Jesus Christ here on earth.

God, seeing all this, and knowing of course what the result of the people's request for a king would be, eventually sent his Son to be the true King and leader of his beloved creation. Jesus shows us what a true king is: one who uses his power and his love to lead his people with true compassion. As Paul says to the Ephesians, God

> raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:20-23)

In his power and authority, from his seat at the right hand of God, Jesus reaches out to us in love and compassion, wanting us to know the fullness of life which

can only be obtained through faith in him. Our King is our shepherd: the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus has done that, once and for all time, in his death on the cross.

In our Gospel passage, Jesus speaks of himself, the Son of Man, as the judge who "will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:32). The sheep, and the goats, will be subject to judgment together, based on how they served the hungry and the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. The message for us here is pretty clear. We want to be among the sheep, not the goats! Again we see that serving our neighbour when he is in need is how we serve Christ.

But it's important to note that Christ himself has been subject to judgment. He was judged by Pilate, not to mention the crowd of Pharisees and priests who called for his crucifixion. He was judged by human beings, after living the life of a human being. He shared our bread, he shared our homes, he walked our streets, and cared for our neighbours and friends. And then we rejected him, and then he was judged as we are judged, by the civil authorities who arrested him and brought him to trial and finally executed him. All through his life, he knew the life that we know; and then he came to that last earthly judgment.

Yet how different was this human judgment from the judgment to come! By whose authority did Pilate judge Jesus? By human authority only, which should have been guided by heavenly principles, but was in fact the product of selfishness and the seeking of personal power. Jesus was condemned for stirring people up, but he sought to stir them up to an awareness of their responsibility for each other, and of their duty to God. In returning to sit at the right hand of God, following his resurrection, he assumes his Kingship not due to any acclamation by humans, or because he is of the line of David, but through the will and plan of God. He rules with authority greater than any human king could have. He knows our hearts and how stubbornly we tend to resist outside rule. We don't live as sheep naturally, which is ironic, because we were created to be his sheep, and we who follow the great Shepherd will follow him to life eternal.

Next week we begin the new Christian year, with the first Sunday in Advent. So while we celebrate the kingship of Christ today, we are at the same time looking toward his birth as a helpless babe in the manger at Bethlehem. God sent his only Son, begotten of God in a way we do not understand, to be born as any human baby is born. He comes into the world in the usual way of children. Yet the Wise Men will seek, and find, a King. Truly, like the old Israelites, we are given a King, one greater than we could ever ask for. Glory be to God on high, and praise be to his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.