

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.

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.

Psalm 100

¹Make a joyful noise to the LORD, | all you lands!

²Serve the LORD with gladness; come into God's presence | with a song.

**³Know that the LORD is God, our maker to whom | we belong;
we are God's people and the sheep | of God's pasture. R**

⁴Enter the gates of the LORD with thanksgiving and the | courts with praise;
give thanks and bless God's | holy name.

**⁵Good indeed is the LORD, whose steadfast love is | everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from | age to age.**

Gospel Reading: 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.”

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, saying "Hear us, O God," and responding, "Your mercy is great."

A brief silence.

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

You cause rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. Direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all people in ways that are sustainable for the earth. 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.

Heal the sinful divisions we erect between us and release us from systems of oppression and prejudice. Restore our capacity to see your image in those whose dignity we have stripped away (*especially our Indigenous neighbours, migrant workers, and refugees.*). Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

Pour out the gifts of your Spirit on children and youth throughout the church. Sustain those who work in children's ministry, youth ministry, and campus ministry as they nurture the gifts of young people. 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.**



A reflection for Reign of Christ Sunday...

We Embody the Presence of Christ

It is possible that the biggest barrier to accepting this as our lifelong vocation is not a lack of faith but a lack of imagination.

On this final Sunday of the liturgical year, we receive a parable from Jesus challenging and inspiring our imaginations to grasp our whole vocation that is celebrated in baptism: to embody Christ in every moment and to engage every part of our world as Christ's redeemed creation.

The parable of the sheep and the goats has sometimes been used to instill fear of God's judgment. However, it is possible that Jesus' point here is to urge his disciples to share God's generous saving grace with all. Jesus' parables consistently offer a simple setting and story, but behind them lie a world of rich meaning that takes a lifetime to unpack. For this reason, Jesus' parables are important texts for the postmodern church, which is hungry for story, for connection, and for meaning for our faithful lifelong questions.

With shepherding texts from Ezekiel (34:11-16, 20-24) and the Psalm (95:1-7a) as well as Ephesians (1:15-23), an epistle written to build faith, we have a constellation of texts that make the shape of God's intimate — even incarnational — love of creation. The parable even suggests that being merely intentional about ministry in the name of Jesus is not the point. After all, both "sheep" and "goats" groups are equally shocked at the news that Jesus was present in those relationships involving thirst, imprisonment, and so forth. Instead, Jesus seems to invite us to wonder what's at the deepest foundation of our presence and purpose—and perhaps even walk away faithfully bewildered at the possibilities of God's kingdom being practiced on earth as it is in heaven.

What if we really do embody the presence of Christ?