

CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

Proper 29 - Year A

This Bible study was written by Maggie Nancarrow for Proper 29 (A) in 2020.

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹ For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will sort them out. ¹² As shepherds sort out their flocks when they are among scattered sheep,^[a] so I will sort 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 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 strays, 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.

Commentary from Maggie Nancarrow

In Ezekiel, we are given a less familiar text about a more familiar image: God as the shepherd of the sheep. Writing from Babylon, Ezekiel has experienced the fall of Judah and deportation to Babylon. Ezekiel is currently under the thumb of a very different kind of kingship—the rule of an authoritarian, conquering king, legitimated by religion, who consumes the weak and those unable to defend themselves. This makes his vision of God's leadership and reign all the more significant. The lost will be found, the weak tended, the injured bandaged, the lean fed. The fat, the ones who grew big and strong by unjustly feeding off the weak, will receive their just rewards. These images are vital ways of showing what kind of leader God chooses to be, and what the reign of Christ will entail.

Discussion Questions

What unjust human rule do you notice in the world around you? How might this vision of God as king, caring for the lost in the flock, speak hope into these situations?

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.

Commentary from Maggie Nancarrow

In this psalm of praise, God is named as creator and king, faithful and merciful to all the lands. Unlike our other readings for Christ the King Sunday, the central function of the people in this song is to rejoice, to be joyful, to praise and move toward God. With the world as it is, crisis after crisis abounding, it can be easy for us to be ultra-focused on God's condemnation of what is unjust, punishments or retributions for those who refuse to serve the least of these. Yet, through this psalm, we are reminded that following God is also about joy: joy in God's creation, joy in our own selves as God created us, joy in receiving mercy, and joy in God's faithfulness to us.

Discussion Questions

When was the last time you experienced a moment of true joy? How can you pray with that moment, lift it up to God, and be thankful for it?

How can you cultivate moments of joy in your life, even amid hard circumstances?

Ephesians 1:15-23

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, ¹⁷that 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 perceive 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.

Commentary from Maggie Nancarrow

Paul is, if anything, an amazing teacher on the nature of Christ. Here, he speaks as though Christ's reign is already here, and it is a powerful image of the one raised from the dead, who now holds authority over the entire cosmos. No empire or leader can take this power from our crucified Lord, now raised. Christ's power and authority come from that act of laying everything down and walking through death into life again, on behalf of all those on this earth in need of new life. Because of this, God has lifted up his name, placed all of creation under his feet and into his body. In the context of Christ the King Sunday, this invites us to wonder how that authority is at work in our own lives.

Discussion Questions

Who—or what—has authority over you in your daily activities?

How might we live if we trusted that Christ did indeed have the only authority that mattered?
What small step would you take first?

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. 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 who 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 brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who 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.”

Commentary from Maggie Nancarrow

In this passage, the reign of God is clearly seen as a time of reckoning. Matthew is consistent here in his distrust of religion that does not act in the best interest of the hungry, poor, and lost. Christ the King is the one who will implement a just rule for the world, a rule that privileges those who are in league with the weak, rather than those who are in league with the strong. Likewise, Christ as King can be found in those all around us who are strangers, hungry, naked, sick, in prison, and thirsty. The good news of this passage is the promise that, someday, the world will be turned over—and those who do the work of serving the least will be those who celebrate and rejoice with God. In our current world, with human powers reigning as they are, it can feel as though care for the least of these is an exercise in futility. These efforts may feel like a useless drop in an ocean of pain and injustice, but the promise to us in this passage is that in God’s reign, in God’s dream, in God’s time, these drops create an ocean of restoration. God notices what we are doing, even if the powers and the authorities of this world seem to have no interest—and in time, it will matter.

Discussion Questions

Who in your neighborhood is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, or welcoming the stranger?

How may the reign of Christ be found there among them?

Based on who Christ claims to be in this passage, who in your neighborhood is Christ right now?