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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 22, 2020
Christ the King Sunday
The Last Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 Matthew 27:27-31

Hymns: 361; 352; 783; 377:10

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24

‘For thus says the Lord GOD: “Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹²As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶“I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.” ...

²³I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our Redeemer King, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: This last Sunday of the church year is Christ the King Sunday.

It is an appropriate way to end the church year. We are looking for the coming of our King, and we are told that He will come again in glory! That is what the end of the church year, as well as part of our coming advent observance is about.

Jesus Christ is King, and the prospect of His coming in glory brings thoughts of judgment, and the fiery destruction of all the earth. It is referred to as DOOMS DAY by many, and there is a real reason for the those who do not believe, those who are not prepared for Christ's coming to be afraid of that day. Christ the King is coming. We ought to be prepared.

But our perception of Christ the King should not be limited to the coming judgment! Our Scripture lessons have already given us a greater perspective and understanding of Christ as our King. Our epistle lesson spoke of our King as our risen Lord who is the first of many who shall rise to life everlasting. Our King is a Victorious King; the last enemy to be defeated is death.

Our gospel lesson took us to Jesus' passion where we see Jesus mocked by the Roman guard, "Hail, King of the Jews!" On the cross our King served as our Champion was engaged in mortal combat against the devil. We see our King dying in our place. Christ, our King, gave Himself into death to destroy the power of the devil.

In our sermon text the Holy Spirit shines yet another light on Christ as our King presenting Him to us as --

THEME: Our Shepherd King.

Our text this morning may sound more fitting for "Good Shepherd Sunday" in the spring. What makes these verses important for this last

Sunday of the church year is how the Lord identifies the Shepherd in these verses as the Son of David, and declares:

I. The Son of David is Prince.

We read verses 23 and 24 at the end of our text:

Ezekiel 34:23-24 “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.”

By the time that Ezekiel wrote these words David had been dead and buried for centuries. Dark days had befallen the land. The people of northern tribes in the kingdom of Israel had been taken away by the Assyrians decades earlier, never to return. The southern kingdom of Judah had now been conquered by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar and already two stages of the Babylonian captivity had occurred, Ezekiel being among those who had been dragged off hundreds of miles from Judah to live in captivity.

This terrible judgment had all happened because of the evil that had thrived in Judah. Idol worship had been rampant with much sexual promiscuity and even human sacrifice included in these false religions. The kingdom’s leaders rarely initiated reform. In fact, the last several kings of Judah reveled in the evil, and imprisoned or executed those who dared speak out against them or got in the way of the pursuit of their carnal pleasures. The spiritual leaders of Judah sought their own gain and preached whatever they thought the people wanted to hear. The Lord was angry with them *“because they have seduced My people, saying, ‘Peace!’ when there is no peace!”* (Ezekiel 13:10)

This kind of leadership not only misled the people but was very harmful on both spiritual and physical levels. True prophets of God like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel were ignored, or worse.

For those who would listen, who feared the Lord, God held out hope in the Son of David whom the Lord would establish as Prince to rule over the people of Israel, indeed, to rule over God’s people for all ages to come. The Lord directs the people’s minds back to the promise He made to David while David was king over all

Israel; the promise that one of his descendants would be king over God's people forever. The Lord had promised David, "*When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.*"¹³ *He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*" (2 Samuel 7:12-13) David understood that this Descendent of which the Lord spoke was not Solomon, but the Christ.

And so the angel Gabriel told Mary of her Son Jesus, "*The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.*" (Luke 1:32-33).

Jesus is that Son of David who rules over all the people of God. Our text reveals what kind of Ruler this Son of David, Christ our King was going to be. Christ was to be the Shepherd King! It's almost an oxymoron to think of a Shepherd King. A shepherd is a lowly position in which one cares for the needs of lowly sheep, even caring for their wounds and sicknesses. It's a humble job, not glorious befitting a king! A shepherd's job can be rather dirty. David began as a shepherd and the Lord reminded David, "*I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel.*" (2 Samuel 7:8). So now it is the Christ who is our Shepherd King, it is Christ who cares for His flock, His people.

II. Our Shepherd King Gathers His Flock.

Those were dark days in the history of the Jews when the Lord gave Ezekiel this message of hope for the future.

Ezekiel 34:11-13a 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out."¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day."¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land;

Cloudy and dark days. As long as the walls of Jerusalem were standing and as long as the temple was still standing the people of the Jews found hope in those structures. But then their hopes were dashed when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and flattened the temple. The people had placed their hope in things, and not in the Lord! The Lord was directing them to find their hope in Him and in the Shepherd King whom He promised to send them.

The Shepherd King would begin His care of sheep by seeking out and gathering the sheep from wherever they may have been scattered, on that cloudy and dark day in the history of Israel. The Shepherd King won't give up. He searches and He rescues and He gathers, and He brings His sheep and lambs into a safe and good land.

This was a message of great hope for the Jews in exile, and it continues to be a message of hope and comfort for us yet today. When we consider Christ our King, we also know Him as our Good Shepherd Who cares for us. Cloudy and dark days come into every life, including into the lives of every child of God. When we face those dark days in our lives it is comforting to know the Lord is by our side. He is present to help us and deliver us.

Right now many within the Church in other parts of the world are facing the cloudy and dark days of persecution. Such days may come, indeed will come into our lives also to one extent or another. When dark days descend upon us, remember that we are not lost. Our Shepherd King is always looking out for us. He has gathered us and led us into the safe haven of His Church on earth. He will deliver us into our heavenly home.

III. Our Shepherd King Preserves His Flock.

The Lord promises:

Ezekiel 34:13b-16 “ ‘I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,’ says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will

seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.’ ”

This picture of being under the Shepherd’s care may easily be interpreted mostly if not completely in terms of physical and temporal provisions. Without doubt, the Lord assures us that He will care for our every bodily need. Jesus reminded us that if He provides for the birds of the air, surely, He will also provide for us.

The Lord’s greater concern for us is spiritual. In the days of the Prophet Ezekiel the Lord was upset with the false prophets who were feeding the people lies and not leading them in the paths of righteousness. The spiritual food that we receive remains the Lord’s greatest concern, and He has provided us with the Bread of Life in Jesus Himself. All the nourishment our souls need is presented to us in the pure gospel of His love and forgiveness. It is through the gospel that the Lord comforts His people and calms them in the cloudy and dark days. We do well to remember that as our King He sacrificed Himself for us on the cross. He gave His life that we might be delivered from sin’s curse of death and possess the hope of everlasting life with Him in heaven.

The Lord holds out hope for us, even in our weakness. He promises to bind up that which is broken and strengthen that which is sick. When we stumble and fall, when dark days come upon us in sickness or trouble the Lord Jesus will lift us up and bind our wounds and strengthen and comfort us. Christ our King preserves us in all our ways and remains our hope of life throughout our days.

We are at the end of the church year. Our meditations have taken us to the message of Christ’s return. We know that He will come again a glorious King, to judge the living and the dead. All shall stand before Him. We shall be comforted. On that Day He will continue to be our Shepherd King who leads His sheep into the heavenly pastures. But as for those who despise the Lord, who attack His flock, He promises justice. In our text they are referenced as the fat and the strong. They will be destroyed. He will feed them in judgment, even as He guides His flock into the verdant pastures of heaven.

May we always sing the praises of Christ our Shepherd King!

“O Bringer of salvation, Who wondrously hast wrought
Thyself the revelations Of love beyond our thought,
We worship Thee, we bless Thee, To Thee, O Christ, we sing;
We praise Thee and confess Thee, Our gracious Lord and King.

“In Thee all fulness dwelleth, All grace and pow’r divine;
The glory that excelleth, O, Son of God, is Thine.
We worship Thee, we bless Thee, To Thee, O Christ, we sing;
We praise Thee and confess Thee, Our glorious Lord and King.”
(The Lutheran Hymnal 352:2-3)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)