

**Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2020**

## **Christ the King**

### **Collect**

God the Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King  
and to follow in his service,  
whose kingdom has no end;  
for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, one glory.

**Amen.**

**First reading:** Ezekiel 34:11-16. 20-24

<sup>11</sup> For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. <sup>21</sup> Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, <sup>22</sup> I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

<sup>23</sup> I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

**Second Reading** Ephesians 1:15-23

<sup>15</sup> I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>[a]</sup> toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup> God<sup>[a]</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**Gospel** Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup> "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. <sup>32</sup> 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, <sup>33</sup> and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> 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; <sup>35</sup> 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, <sup>36</sup> 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.' <sup>37</sup> 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? <sup>38</sup> And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? <sup>39</sup> And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>[a]</sup> you did it to me.' <sup>41</sup> 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; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> 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.' <sup>44</sup> 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?' <sup>45</sup> 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.' <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

## Reflection

Here we are – the last Sunday of the church's year. This time last year we had not the faintest inkling of what was about to befall us. For the past 8 months we have had much of our worship curtailed, yet in spite of all that has happened, Christ has continued to be present as we journey along this unknown path. Now, on this last Sunday of the church's year, we remind ourselves and celebrate that Jesus is indeed the King of Kings.

In today's Gospel we read that the Son of Man "will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats". At times, the Bible does rather seem to have it in for goats. Whenever sheep and goats appear together, the sheep are the goodies and the goats are the baddies.

This aversion to goats may seem puzzling. But perhaps the explanation may be found in their behaviour. Some who have worked with sheep and goats may well tell you that while sheep can be feisty, goats are often in a league of their own for inquisitiveness and wilfulness. Sheep will permit themselves to be herded, to be gathered in sheepfolds for protection against predators and the elements, and will generally play follow-my-leader in most situations. Sheep farmers sometimes speak of the "collective intelligence" of sheep. Goats, however, are individualists, who do their own thing, go their own way and rarely take notice of what any nearby human might have in mind for them.

When sheep behave like goats, as in today's reading from Ezekiel, they incur censure. And Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that sheep and goats, in this allegory, are defined by their behaviour rather than whether they are, for example, Jews or Gentiles. The sheep are those who served Christ in "the least of these" – the stranger, the person who is hungry, thirsty or naked. The goats are those who did not.

The sheep and goats in this passage are categorised simply by their behaviour. It was not that the "goats" actively sinned, but their sin lay in their failure to serve those in need, and thereby they failed to serve Christ. Those whom the Son of Man blesses in this Gospel reading are blessed not for their faith, nor for acknowledging Christ the King, nor for diligence in prayer. Their blessedness lies in their behaviour, and specifically in the way they treat the weakest and most marginalised in society.

Christ the King, sitting in judgement as befits a king, judges his people according to their actions towards the humblest and lowest in his kingdom.

In the Book of Common Prayer, penitents confess to having "erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep". Furthermore, "we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done". This is known as the sin of omission – not only actively doing what is wrong, but failing to do what is right. In this passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus makes it clear that failure to do what is right is also a sin. When it comes to caring for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, a stranger, someone sick, or prisoner, "just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me". The challenge to us, as modern disciples, is to look with fresh eyes at the opportunities which everyday life in the current pandemic affords us.

Rev Jenny Ellis