

**Bible Study**  
**Christ the King Sunday, Year A**  
**November 26, 2017**

**[RCL]: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46**

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

The term “shepherd” is a common motif in the ancient Near East, and is metaphorically used for the rulers, kings, and leaders of Israel. In this reading, the shepherds have fed themselves instead of the sheep, and the leaders have ruled with tyranny and cruelty (v. 4). Thus, the sheep lack a shepherd.

In verse 11, Yahweh will take personal responsibility to seek the lost, restore the strayed, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak sheep who have suffered as a result of unjust shepherds, and gather them to himself on a safe pasture where they will be healed. The day of thick clouds refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, “the day of the Lord” (Joel 2:2), when the people were carried to Babylon (v. 12). Contrastingly, the new pasture is metaphorically linked to mountain ranges, watercourses, and uninhabited fields which are signs of life, suggesting a change of social, political, economic, and spiritual status for the sheep.

The binary use of sheep and goats, a ram and goats, lean sheep and fat sheep, the fat and the strong, and one group of sheep set apart from another reflects a cosmological setting: a rescue mission taking on a global dimension, in which God begins to reconcile the nations. God’s justice will intervene for the oppressed. In our contemporary understanding, the temptation to satisfy personal ego, materialism, and power at the expense of an ailing society are reminiscent of the fat and the strong sheep. The scattered and bruised sheep represent marginalized persons and communities, like the increasing numbers of refugees the world over, the homeless in our society, and those facing other insecurities.

We must reflect on questions such as “What is our role in protecting and restoring God’s creation?” (v. 18-19), with the understanding that God is determined to bring about a fairness where everyone will be held accountable (v. 20). God will achieve this through his servant David, a symbol of unity bringing together Israel and Judah, and upon whose leadership the Messianic reign will be announced.

- What do you think of when you think of a new pasture for God’s sheep?

**Psalm 100**

This psalm is Deuteronomic in rhythm, and therefore emphasizes the identity of Yahweh’s role as a God of action. The whole earth—all nations—are called by the psalmist to make a joyful noise to God. Our act of worship is equated to service to God. This in turn invites devotion, which brings humanity happiness at the end. Singing is a powerful mode of

worship; it stays in one's memory easier than reading and is often more entertaining. Because of this, it resonates well with offering thanksgiving in the court of the Lord.

Since humans are often tempted to play God by demonstrating ability in the first-person pronouns of "I," "me," and "we," rather than in the humility of a servant or God's instrument, the Psalmist emphasizes "Know this: that the Lord is God" (v 3). This phrase is intentionally inserted to remind us that all that we are and have is God's. In fact, St. Paul echoes with the same tone, as when he writes, "We brought nothing into this world" (1 Tim 6:7).

Because Christians belong to God's pasture, our confines are by nature within the shepherd-sheep paradigm. Listening to the shepherd's voice is important. The sheep are safe entering by the gate, where the master takes stock and assesses the welfare of each animal, and they can appreciate the goodness of Yahweh for the permanent virtue of mercy by which he reconciles and draws people to his fold.

- Have you ever needed a reminder like the one in verse 3? When?

### **Ephesians 1:15-21**

Paul writes concerning the faith and love of the Ephesians, upon which he expresses his gratitude and prayers for the growing community of God.

Faith, which is the state of trust, in this context is reckoned to have yielded fruits of godly virtues like love and hope for this community of saints. A community where faith and works of love in Christ grow is formative for God's saints. Like Paul, the Christians are drawn to uphold such a community with constant prayers. It is evident in both Paul's era and our own that in order to achieve unity, we require faith in Christ, supported by the prayers of all the saints.

Since love is a central theme in Christian teaching, it is imperative that any community of Christians cultivate love for both God and neighbor (cf. Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31). In support of this, Paul invokes divine wisdom, a necessity for every good discernment that leads to truth.

- How do you pray for the whole Church in your worship services? Do you know the people behind the names?
- How will you pray for your faith community this week?

### **Matthew 25:31-46**

Cataclysms like recent hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, and more invite human responses to God's mission in the community.

Matthew's narrative presents Jesus' account of eschatological teaching, which comes immediately before the Passion. The good shepherd is now too judge and king, seated on his throne and administering justice. The sheep and the goats represent the human creation, and as in Ezekiel, the shepherd alone can identify his or her rightful flock. The Son of Man, to whom Scripture refers as the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13; 1 Peter 1: 20), will gather all nations and judge humanity.

As Christians, the take-away in this narrative is connected with human existence, a journey that informs our life both in the here-and-now and at our final destiny. The passage forms reasoning for acts of charity (or *diakonia*). How often did we recognize the Messiah in the little brothers and sisters of the Son of Man? Who is my neighbor? The reign of God, as it draws nearer, presents fresh opportunity for us to ask these questions and offer our hearts and thanksgiving to God.

- When you read this passage, do you immediately think of yourself in the role of the sheep or the goats—or neither—or both? Why?

*Written by The Rev. Fredrick Okoth, a priest from the Anglican province of Kenya - Diocese of Bondo. He is married to Lilian Oduor and is a father of four children, Okoth holds a World Meteorologist Class II Course Certificate and worked with Kenya's government in meteorological services for seven years. He holds a diploma in Pastoral Theology from Bishop Okullu College of Theology and Development, a Bachelor's in Past Pastoral Theology from the Great Lakes University of Kisumu, and is working toward a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies from the General Theological Seminary in New York. Okoth has been a priest for thirteen years, serving as priest-in-charge of four congregations in the Diocese of Bondo. He has also served as an area dean, secretary for clergy welfare, and clerical secretary in the diocesan synod.*

*Published by the Office of Formation of The Episcopal Church, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017. © 2017 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.*