

Christ the King 2020

Readings - Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24, Psalm 100, Ephesians 1:15-23, Matthew 25:31-46

Introduction - The last Sunday in Pentecost is a Christian feast day titled Christ the King. This is a recent addition into the Christian calendar. It was added to the calendar by the Pope in 1927 as a response to rising fascism in Europe to remind the faithful that God is king. This week also represents the end of the liturgical year with the focus on Messiah as both king and judge.

Common Theme - Judgment is not a popular preaching topic, most likely because it involves unpleasantness. One valuable nature of the lectionary is that it makes us focus on all aspects of Scripture and not just our favourite passages from the Bible. The Scriptures before us revolve around the last judgment. They remind that God is both love and a consuming fire. In the end all things that are wrong will be made right and we are not excluded from that process.

Hebraic Perspective - Throughout the Bible we are made aware that God can and does bring judgment on the world. During the Exodus we see God enter into judgment against the gods of Egypt. God is a redeemer, a provider, sustainer and lawgiver. Later, the prophets remind the people that for disobedience judgment looms at the hands of the living God! During the 2nd Temple period the responsibility to enact the final judgment was understood to be the task of the Messiah. The Dead Sea Scrolls community named Melchizedek as the coming messiah and spoke of a day in which he would exact judgement. The criterion for judgment is echoed in the prophets of Israel. It is a care and concern for the weak members of society, the poor, the orphan and widow. Proverbs 19:17 explains that the concept of helping the poor is actually helping the Lord, and the Lord is faithful to reward. This is not biblical socialism. Being poor does not make you holy and being wealthy does not make you evil. Instead it is about imitating God's character as follows of the Messiah.

Reading #1; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 - Ezekiel is the only prophet to be given the title 'son of man' (verse 1). Not to be confused with the Son of Man that is described in the Book of Daniel. Out of compassion and love for His sheep, the Lord will do what the unfaithful shepherds have not done. God will seek and save the lost. This does not exclude us from joining in the redemptive work of God, instead we are assured that God will complete His salvation. During the 1st Temple period, shepherds were held in high esteem, having positions as wealthy landowners and aristocrats. The Patriarchs were shepherd princes, both civil leaders and spiritual guides. The shepherd is not only a saviour but also the judge. Ezekiel promises that God will also judge the proud among the sheep. Those who had become fat and strong, but not fed from the Lord. The Lord will feed the flock with justice (verse 16). We should note that Ezekiel declares that God will save His people, the flock, but also enter into judgment with the people He saved. Lastly we have the messianic promise that God will to appoint the ultimate davidic shepherd over His people.

Reading #2; Psalm 100 - This is the only psalm that has the title מְזִמֹּר לַיהוָה a song of thanksgiving. It is an invitation for the whole earth to worship the Lord. One of the common themes in the psalms is universal salvation. It is interesting to note that prayers constructed by the Jewish people declare that salvation is for all creation, not just for Israel. The psalm acknowledges that our relationship to God is as sheep to a shepherd, more ever this shepherd is the Lord who is good, faithful, with love that endures forever.

Reading #3; Ephesians 1:15-23 - Paul prays that the believers in Ephesus will comprehend the blessings that are theirs as members of the body of messiah. The blessings include a future of

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hope, an inheritance in the saints, and seeing and experiencing the greatness of God's power. The power of the living God sits above all other powers. That power and authority also rests with the Messiah as God places all things under the feet of Jesus. Included in that authority will be the responsibility to bring justice and judgment.

Reading #4; Matthew 25:31-46 - The previous parables (Virgins and Talents) are warnings for the believers to be ready and that we all need to give an account before our Lord and Maker. Judgment will bring out the truth inside of us and is also a part of the messianic age. Jesus describes the process as a separation of sheep and goats. In the ancient world sheep and goats were counted as equal. Sacrifices in Leviticus could be brought from either flock and were considered equal before the Lord. Thus the people being separated were shocked. They had thought themselves secure until the Son of Man revealed the truth. What is interesting is that the standard for the separation of the sheep and goats appears based around deeds. This teaching of Jesus reminds us that faith cannot and should not be separated from action. Hebrews 5:9 'He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him'. We encounter the living Jesus in the poor and then we act like Him in caring for those in need around us. Our faith, when we interpret it as faithfulness, is the basis and the simplest expression of obedience.

Hebraic Context - Six times in Leviticus God says to His people 'to be holy as I am holy'. This prompted exegetes to look at the action of God that make Him holy and to imitate them. Pouring over the Scriptures they studied the deeds of the Lord and came up with the 'Gemilut Hasidim', the acts of loving kindness. These were the deeds of the Lord that revealed His character and His holiness. The desire to truly love God involves discovering what He does and then doing the same thing. Beginning with a question they would ask, how do we know that God clothes the naked? Because He made clothes for Adam and Eve. How do we know that God gives food to the hungry and water to the thirsty? Because He provided mana in the desert and water from the rock. The Acts of loving Kindness include feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, compassion for the oppressed and the prisoner, practicing hospitality with strangers. Exactly the same standard for judgement we see in the parable of the sheep and the goats. If God does these acts and if we love God then we should do these acts.

ACNA Addendum

Psalm 95 - This psalm is traditionally the first psalm said on Shabbat, the Biblical day of rest, which begins on Friday evening. As the sun goes down the psalmist raises his voice and declares that God is the rock of salvation and a great king. Then calls the faithful to kneel before the Creator in worship. Kneeling before a king is an appropriate response. The end of the psalm is a warning to the faithful. The desire in the Psalm, is to hear Gods voice. Should you do so, the warning is not to harden one's hearts to His voice and induce the wrath of God. God's judgement on Israel in the desert was to withhold entrance to the promised Land. Disobedience meant they would not enter the Lord's rest (verse 11). These themes are picked up by the author of Hebrews in Chapters 3 and 4 which describes an even greater millennial Sabbath rest for the people of God.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 - The resurrection proves that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. Jesus rose from the dead on the exact day of the biblical Feast of Firstfruits, that is the day after the Sabbath. As the first fruits His resurrection anticipates and represents our own resurrection. In the Messiah 'all will be made alive'. Some for good and some for bad! There is a judgment coming for

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all creatures. Paul looks forward to when all things are resolved in Jesus and He presents it all to the Father. One aspect of the resurrection is that the Messiah will judge all things, putting all enemies underfoot, even the last enemy which is death itself. This passage concludes with the Son himself becoming subject to the Father in the new age. This is not to say that Jesus is inherently inferior but rather for all eternity God the Father remains God the Father and they continue to relate to each other as *Father and Son*, in a communal framework.