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Lectionary 34, Year A November 22, 2020**

**INTRODUCTION**

*On this final Sunday of the church year our gospel is Jesus’ great story of judgment. In the end, the faithful are those who served Christ by ministering to those who are poor, hungry, naked, sick, or estranged. In the first reading God is the shepherd who seeks the lost, weak, and injured and feeds them with justice. We gather this day to celebrate the reign of Christ and his victory over death, yet we await the consummation of all things yet to come. Acknowledging Christ as our merciful ruler, we go forth that his reign may be known in our loving words and deeds.*

**PRAYER OF THE DAY** Almighty and ever-lasting God, whose will it is to restore all things to your beloved Son, whom you anointed priest forever and king of all creation: Grant that all the people of the earth, now divided by the power of sin, may be united under the glorious and gentle rule of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### Psalm 95:1-7a

Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. **Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.** For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.  **In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also.** The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands have molded the dry land. **Come, let us bow down and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.** For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.

Almighty God, neither let us go astray as did those who murmured in the desert, not let us be torn apart by discord. With Jesus as our shepherd, bring us to enjoy the unity for which he prays; and to you be the glory and the praise now and forever. **Amen.**

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

*Because Israel’s kings proved to be bad shepherds, Ezekiel declares that the Lord will assume the role of shepherd in Israel. The Lord will also set over them a shepherd-messiah, “my servant David,” who will feed and care for the people.*

11Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. 12As 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. 13I 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. 14I 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. 15I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. 16I 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.  
  20Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, 22I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.  
  23I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

**Background**

Ezekiel was a prophet of priestly family, and was commissioned as a prophet while in exile in Babylon. He was probably taken in the first wave of exiles in 597, along with other powerful and prominent Judahites after Nebuchadnezzar’s first defeat of Judah. He prophesied between 593 and 571 BCE. His messages were addressed both to the exiles in Babylon as well as to those who remained in Judah.

“Shepherd” is a symbol for “king” – not only in Israel, but in all the Ancient Near East. This chapter consists of two basic sections (vv. 1-16, and vv. 17-30) our pericope uses only parts of each section.

**Verse by Verse**

*Vv. 1-10 describe the misdeeds of the “shepherds of Israel”. Vv. 11 -15 – God restores the flock, and places them in their own land, and will perform the proper work of a shepherd, which has been neglected by the kings until now.*

**11Thus says the Lord God:** *(Heb. Adonai YHWH)* **I myself will search for my sheep,** *(Heb. can refer to various domestic animals – sheep, goats, etc.)* **and will seek them out.**

**12As 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.***(The Day of the Lord prophesied in 30:2b-3 – Wail, “Alas for the day!” For a day is near, the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.)*

**13I 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** *(Heb. hill country)* **of Israel, by the watercourses,** *(Heb. brooks, channels)* **and in all the inhabited parts of the land.**

**14I 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.***(This echoes Psalm 23 where YHWH is the shepherd, giving the sheep all that they need. Also echoes of Isaiah 40:11 – He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.)*

**15I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God.***(When the sheep lie down, they are safe – the shepherd is keeping watch over them, protecting them)*

**16I 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.**

*Verses 17-19 describes unacceptable behaviors of “my flock”, trampling the pasture and fouling the waters so that “my sheep” don’t have enough.*

**20Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.***This sounds like Pharaoh’s dream in Genesis 41, but here the fat sheep are so because they have hogged the good pasture and clean water.*

**21Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide,**

**22I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged** *(Heb. a prey)***; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.** *(Saving and judging are part of the same action here. Also the gospel reading in Matt. 25)*

**23I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David,** *(consistent OT reference to David; only NT use in Luke 1 in the Benedictus – He has raised up for us a mighty Savior, born of the house of his servant David)* **and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.**

**24And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince** *(of the Davidic line, but not king)* **among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.**

**Theology: God is the good shepherd and cares for the flock, but God also expects the flock to care for each other!**

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**SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:15-23**

*In this passage, God is praised for revealing ultimate divine power in raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrected, exalted Christ is Lord of both the church and the entire universe, now and in the age to come.*

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. 17I 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, 18so 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, 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.

**Background**

*Although v.1 claims Pauline authorship, most scholars consider this letter pseudonymous (not copyright infringement but as an honor or tribute to Paul. Also NRSV and other versions include “in Ephesus” in v. 1, other ancient authorities lack this location. It probably dates to 80-95 CE, and may have been written by a disciple of Paul after his death in 66-67 CE. It seems to be directed to a gentile congregation with “little perception” of being part of Israel. Language clues and usage differ from the authentic Pauline letters.*

*Just a sidebar: in the Anchor Bible series, there are TWO volumes for Ephesians by Marcus Barth!*

**Verse by Verse**

**15I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love** *(Gk. agapen)* **toward all the saints,** *(Almost a direct quote of Colossians 1:4)* **and for this reason 16I do not cease to give thanks** *(Gk. euchariston)* **for you as I remember** *(Gk. mneian – personal remembrance, recollection)* **you in my prayers.**

**17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit** *(Gk. pneuma – “a” spirit, not “the” Spirit)* **of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,**

**18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened** *(Gk. pephotismenos brought to light, illumined)***, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints,***The saints are called to live that calling. 4:1-3 – I… beg you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

**19and what is the immeasurable** *(Gk. hyperballon – lit. to throw beyond the mark, surpass, exceed)* **greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working** *(Gk. energian - productive work, activity; in the NT, describes divine activity*.*)* **of his great power.**

**20God put this power to work** *(Gk. energeken – same verb as above)* **in Christ when he raised** *(Gk. egeiros – wakened, raised)* **him from the dead and seated him at his right hand** *(Gk. dexia - Ps. 110 – The LORD says to my lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.)* **in the heavenly places,** *(Gk. epouraniois – heavenly, celestial)*

**21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion,** *(all rival powers, heavenly and/or earthly)* **and above every name that is named,** *(Philippians 2:9 - Therefore God has highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name)* **not only in this age but also in the age to come.**

**22And he has put all things under his feet** *(also Ps. 110 above and 1 Cor. 15:24-25 – Then comes the end when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.)* **and has made him the head** *(Gk. kephalen – head, cornerstone – 1 Peter 2:7; Ps.118:22 – the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.)* **over all things for the church, 23which is his body,** *(1 Cor. 12:27 – Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.;* [*Colossians 1:18*](https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Bible/TextSearch) *He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.)* **the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

**Theology: We know that Christ is raised and dies no more;**

**Embraced by death, he broke its fearful hold,**

**And our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia! (LBW #189)**

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**GOSPEL: Matthew 25:31-46**

*Jesus compares himself to a king who moves among his subjects to see how he is treated: what is done for the least of those who belong to his family is truly done for him.*

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 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 that 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 who are members of my family you did it to me.’ 41Then 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; 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.”

**Background**

This is a vision of the Parousia – the last judgment.

**Verse by Verse**

**[Jesus says to the disciples:] 31“When the Son of Man** *(Jesus uses this term when speaking of himself. It appears in all four gospels, Acts and Revelation.)* **comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,** *(cf. Deut. 33:2b – With him [the LORD] were myriads of holy ones; Zech. 14:5 – Then the LORD my God will come, and* **C:\Users\Mary\Downloads\Icon1 Christ the King A (Framed) (Clip Art).tif***all the holy ones with him.; Dan. 7:22 also refers to “the holy ones of the Most High)* **then he will sit on the throne of his glory.***The place of power and of judgment.*

**32All the nations** *(Gk. ethne – translated “gentiles”elsewhere)* **will be gathered before him, and he will separate** *(Gk. aphorisei – separate with a boundary)* **people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,** *(Exodus 12:5 says the Passover lamb may be taken “from the sheep or from the goats)*

**33and he will put the sheep at his right hand** *(Gk. dexion – favored place, position of power – Ps. 110: 1 The LORD says to my Lord, sit at my right hand)* **and the goats at the left.***Since the majority of humans are right-handed, left handedness has had a negative connotation. In heraldry, the “bend sinister” signified illegitimacy. In the old “Tom Terrific” cartoons, one of the villains was Simon Bar Sinister!*

**34Then the king** *(Gk. Basileus – now “King” by virtue of enthronement? In Jesus’ parables “the king” is usually God, but here it is the Son of Man )* **will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed** *(Gk. eulogemenoi – speak well – Latin benedictus)* **by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;***(Gk. kataboles kosmou)*

**35for I** *(1st person singular throughout)* **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,***(Gk. synegagte – receive with hospitality)*

**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** *\*Gk. dikaioi – righteous, innocent, holy)* **will answer him, ‘Lord,** *(Gk. Kyrie – respectful address, roughly “sir”, but also used to refer to God and the resurrected Jesus)* **when was it that we saw you** *(2nd person singular throughout)* **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** *(Gk. Amen – only once)*  **I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family** *(Gk. adelphon – lit. brothers, but may also refer to fellow Christians)*  **you did it to me.’**

**41Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed,** *(Gk. kateramenoi – cursed, doomed)* **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,** *(Gk. Kyrie as above)* **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** *(Gk. Amen – as above)* **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,** *(Gk. kolasin aionion)* **but the righteous into eternal life.”***(Gk. zoen aionion)*

**Theology: *Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Matt. 7:22***