

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to November 16**



Proper 28

Year A

RCL

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalm 100

Matthew 25:31-46

The Collect

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

AMEN

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. 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. 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. 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. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says

the Lord GOD. 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.

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

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

Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said, “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. 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, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 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; 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, 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.’ 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? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 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, you did it to me.’ 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; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 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.’ 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?’ 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.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

SERMON

Today is Christ the King Sunday, properly known as the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Matthew sets the stage for us:

Jesus said, “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. 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, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

How on earth are 21st Century people to approach the King of the Universe? Presenting ourselves to secular kings and queens is an art left behind in the 18th Century. Where do we find the humility such a task requires? I’m afraid, as I look around at a world whose wheels appear to be coming off, that we have given up the search for that humility, and taken an easier path – that of partisanship. “Yay, us!”, in place of “Thy will be

done”. That’s why I’m always happy when Christ the King Sunday comes around. It offers us a perspective which is not clouded by the traditions surrounding other, more familiar, church observances. Christmas has been around so long that it has grown feathers – Santa and Reindeer, shopping and family time – it’s altogether too cluttered to allow us to ponder its meaning. Likewise, Easter with children and colored eggs and bunnies. Christ the King, by comparison, is a relatively recent addition to the Western liturgical calendar, having been instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI for the Roman Catholic Church and adopted in 1970 by Protestant churches. It hasn’t had time to grow distracting feathers, and that means that we can look directly at the day – the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – without having to make room for elves or bunnies. When we really face that awesome title the

only proper response is to fall to your knees in fear and trembling. That's hard for us, so, generally speaking, we'd rather not. Hard or not, preferences aside, the church says we must, and so we will for we are the creations of his hands.

“Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe”. You simply cannot say that without becoming breathless. We're so accustomed to thinking of ourselves as captains of our own ships that it is almost impossible to realign ourselves to the reality that we are not even deckhands on a timber raft. The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe demands that we engage the authority of Jesus and our relationship with Him. We are not meant to be frightened, but we ARE meant to live in awareness of our position as both the loved, AND the created.

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 pas-
ture and the sheep of his hand.

When 21st Century people look about them and see
only crisis and threats of doom, when we see rulers of

nations with the power to destroy all life on the planet insulting and provoking each other, raising the temperature of the discussion to terrifying heights, then our quite reasonable fears speak to us in voices so loud that we forget what we once knew so well – that salvation lies only with God. When our fears speak to our innermost heart and frighten us we turn for salvation to those promising us safety, even those whose lives do not reflect the teachings of our Lord. Dana Hall McCain in the Douthan (Alabama) Eagle, writes:

“I remember when we said, and said often, that the good character of a leader was an absolute essential. Then 2016 happened. Suddenly, the bar had to be lowered because we couldn’t possibly be faithful to God when the stakes were so high, right? God surely didn’t expect us to trust him and refuse to align with those whose lives are in direct conflict with much of his word in times like

these, did he?”¹

“God surely didn’t expect us to trust him and refuse to align with those whose lives are in direct conflict with much of his word in times like these, did he?”

Even if the people in politics are showing themselves to be unworthy of our trust, surely, God won’t mind if we hold our noses and throw in with them for the common good because the stakes are so frighteningly high.

The prophet of the Lord, replies,

He has told you, O mortal,
what is good;
and what does the Lord
require of you
but to do justice, and to
love kindness,
and to walk humbly
with your God?

Christ the King allows us to adjust our eyesight to the realities of Creation. When we think of Jesus, we often

¹ Dana Hall McCain in the Douthan (Alabama) Eagle

think of Him on the cross, or in the tomb, or lying in a manger. Each of these images has worth and teaching, but each of these images portrays Jesus as powerless. On Christ the King Sunday, our eyes are opened and we see, in place of those images, the King of the Universe. Jesus began his time on earth in a manger. He ended it through the cross to a lonely tomb, but in the meantime, Jesus didn't spend his time on earth in idleness and acceptance of "the way things are", looking forward to going to heaven. He spoke. He acted. He knocked over the Temple furniture. "The way things are" describes this world of sin in which men of power turn their backs on acting for the good of all to abuse women and pursue money. The church, the body of Christ, must not be faithless to our reason for existence. The body of Christ, has a calling and, too often, has been unfaithful to it, offering nothing more than a hiding place from which we

can glare disapprovingly at the sins of the world and comfort ourselves that we, at least, are acting righteously.

I'd like to suggest that the United States Constitution puts only one obligation on individual citizens – to vote. And not only that, but to vote responsibly, exercising the judgment you have been given so as to choose the candidate who will carry the burdens of office with the intention of confronting the sins of this world rather than burying them. We have had enough and more than enough of candidates who speak conformity with our Lord but act otherwise.

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. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your

name?’ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.’

The sanctimonious evildoers we see on the news who seek to cover their sins by wrapping the church around themselves have judged themselves already. Christ the King will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.” So must the body of Christ speak on this, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Archbishop Timothy Dolan once said,

“Maybe the greatest threat to the Church is not heresy, not dissent, not secularism, not even moral relativism, but this sanitized, feel-good, boutique, therapeutic spirituality that makes no demands, calls for no sacrifice, asks for no conversion, entails no battle against sin, but only soothes and affirms”.

Go ye from here and be about your master’s business.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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