

## Action and Reflection

The story of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 begins with the Son of Man on a throne. It is an image of a king sitting in judgment. In any era of human history, this image of an all-powerful ruler sitting in judgement would be consistent with our images of power and authority. What follows runs against all of our expectations. The king connects his presence to the people who are poor and oppressed. This does not fit our human practices of power. Even a benevolent leader is not seen in the presence of the least among us.

Though Jesus makes this connection, it is easy to read this story and get hooked into the power dynamics of judgment. We may wonder if we are a sheep or a goat and think about this status in an eternal sense as it relates to our relationship with God. This heavy reflection may lead us to think we might somehow have to earn our way into God's grace.

The theology of the cross finds Jesus exercising his kingship through the weakness of the cross. From the resurrection that follows this death, we receive the gift of life. This gift comes with the freedom to leave aside worries about eternity in favor of attending to faithful living today. If Jesus frees us from concern about our relationship with God, the story of the sheep and the goats becomes more of a checklist for grace-filled living than a scorecard for eternity. It becomes an invitation and a guide rather than an indictment.

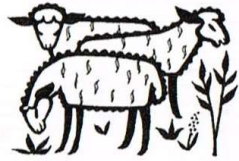
• Included in this invitation is an opportunity for reflection. Neither the sheep nor the goats realize how their actions have or have not been faithful. In this way the story gives us a simple gift by which to measure our path in faith and reflection the ways we spend our days.



*Come, inherit the kingdom  
prepared for you*

MATTHEW 25:34





# Celebrate

Christ the King  
November 22, 2020

*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

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.**

## 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.*

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.

## Psalm

**Psalm 95:1-7a; refrain, Ps. 95:7**



We are the peo-ple of God's pas-ture and the sheep of God's hand.

Come, let us sing <sup>1</sup> to the LORD;

let us shout for joy to the rock of<sup>1</sup> our salvation.

**<sup>2</sup>Let us come before God's presence <sup>1</sup> with thanksgiving  
and raise a loud shout to the <sup>1</sup> LORD with psalms.**

<sup>3</sup>For you, LORD, <sup>1</sup>are a great God,  
and a great ruler a-<sup>1</sup>bove all gods.

**<sup>4</sup>In your hand are the caverns <sup>1</sup>of the earth;  
the heights of the hills are <sup>1</sup>also yours. R**

<sup>5</sup>The sea is yours, <sup>1</sup> for you made it,  
and your hands have molded <sup>1</sup> the dry land.

**<sup>6</sup>Come, let us worship <sup>1</sup> and bow down,  
let us kneel before the <sup>1</sup> LORD our maker.**

<sup>7a</sup>For the LORD <sup>1</sup>is our God,  
and we are the people of God's pasture  
and the sheep <sup>1</sup>of God's hand. **R**



## 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.*

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love 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 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

*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:] “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, 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.”



## Prayers of Intercession

*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

*A brief silence.*

Sovereign of all, train our ears to hear your cry in the needs of those around us. Bless all social ministries of the church through which we seek to serve others as we ourselves have been served. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

You cause rain to fall on the just and unjust alike. Direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all people in ways that are sustainable for the earth. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Bring peace to every place where conflict rages (*especially*). Grant opportunities for ending divisions among us and usher in your reign of unity and reconciliation. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Heal the sinful divisions we erect between us and release us from systems of oppression and prejudice. Restore our capacity to see your image in those whose dignity we have stripped away (*especially*). Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Pour out the gifts of your Spirit on children and youth throughout the church. Sustain those who work in children's ministry, youth ministry, and campus ministry as they nurture the gifts of young people. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

Thank you for saints now departed who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to the sick. Inspire us by their example, that we may see your presence in those in need around us. Hear us, O God.  
**Your mercy is great.**

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.  
**Amen.**

## Preparing for Next Week

**Monday** (commemoration of Clement, Bishop of Rome, died around 100; Miguel Agustín Pro, martyr, died 1927) Psalm 7. **Tuesday** (commemoration of Justus Falckner, died 1723; Jehu Jones, died 1852; William Passavant, died 1894; pastors in North America) Esther 8:3-17. **Wednesday** (commemoration of Isaac Watts, hymnwriter, died 1748) John 5:19-40. **Thursday** (Day of Thanksgiving [USA]) Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19. **Friday** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18. **Saturday** Micah 2:1-13. **First Sunday of Advent** Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37.

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