

The Last Sunday of Pentecost— Christ the King

November 23, 2008

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalm 100

Ephesians 1:15-23

Matthew 25:31-46

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have a promise, a divine promise, you and I, that God will call us, His people, to the “glorious inheritance among His saints.” So says Paul in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus. His words echo the even more ancient promise made by Ezekiel, the promise that God will search us out from all the places we have strayed—that doesn’t mean geographically – gather us, feed us and lead us to shelter and to rest. That is a very nice promise.

Of course, being biblical, both Ezekiel and Paul put the promise in terms of sheep, a very common sight in their world. The people of their audience lived in the midst of flocks of sheep, sheep everywhere, and they knew that those sheep had a few common characteristics. One characteristic was passivity: as long as the grass grew green, life was fine. Another characteristic was that they were easily led; they were born followers. It took very little persuasion to move the entire flock to green pastures or to disaster. Any leader would do.

So Paul and Ezekiel talk about leaders, shepherds. Ezekiel speaks of David; Paul speaks of Jesus; one shepherd, placed by God over

all His flock, one compassionate, loving shepherd to lead all those wandering sheep – read “people” – to safety and security. That’s the point of the Gospel isn’t it, the point of every Gospel reading? It speaks of compassion and care and love, the love of God for His people.

This morning’s Gospel is the final reading for this year. Next Sunday our church calendar begins a new year with the season of Advent, a new season of preparation for the Feast of the Incarnation, Christmas, and all that that great breaking into history brings. This Sunday we receive the promise, but we also receive a job. We are working sheep, strange as that may sound. We are sought out and brought in to be God’s special flock, led by our shepherd, Jesus Christ, to do His will, to be His hands and eyes and voice in this huge pasture of ours.

Which means it is our task to feed the hungry, to give water to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, and to visit the prisoner. That’s what it means to follow Jesus. You will remember that Jesus asked Peter no less than three times “Simon, do you love me?” Presiding Bishop Allen, a few Presiding Bishops ago, always said that that was the final exam for all Christians, for us all, and that in saying “Yes, Lord,” we take upon ourselves the work given by Jesus, “Feed my sheep.”

In His Holy Name.