



Christ the King Sunday-November 22, 2020

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 25:31-46

“Christ the King’s Memory”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have reached the end of the church year. This last Sunday of the year we name Christ the King Sunday. Fortunately, the naming of this Sunday hasn’t fallen victim to name changes like many schools that have changed their mascots to a name that is less offensive to some people. However, when we listen to what Christ the King is doing from his throne in the reading for today, you might also be offended and want to change the name of this Sunday to “Sheep and Goat” Sunday.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says, “I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved.” Once again, Jesus is dividing and sorting, not unifying and letting a few goats slip by his careless watch into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said, there is only one way into the kingdom of heaven, those who go through the gate and I am the gate.

I recall several years ago when my father and I sorted slaughter hogs for sale. One of us would have a sort panel by the gate of the pen and the other would use a panel to bring the hogs closer to the gate and then we would decide which hogs would be sorted into the trailer. Every once in a while, a hog we really didn’t want, would slip by our sorting panel. Unless the hog that slipped by us was extremely different from the hogs we wanted, we usually just let it go knowing that it would be difficult to sort out again and we tried to be more careful sorting the rest of them.

Whether we were sorting hogs or cattle for market, our efforts were to first sort the “better doing” livestock from those that didn’t do as well. Those that were “better doers” were the ones that had gained faster than the others which earned them the privilege of leaving the farm before the others.

As you listened to Jesus sort the sheep from the goats, you may have heard that Jesus was sorting the sheep from the goats like we sorted livestock. You may have heard Jesus was sorting the good doing sheep from the goats who did nothing at all. Or maybe when you heard this story you were offended by Jesus who did not promote inclusiveness, but sorted every goat to his left hand of condemnation from the sheep that he put at his right hand. After all, goats aren’t all that different from sheep. They look somewhat similar and there must be some goats who must have done something good. If you are offended by Jesus who separates rather than unifies, then you might also vote for changing the name of this day to “Sheep and Goat” Sunday and not hear what Jesus preached consistently that he came to divide the faithful from the faithless. Jesus can’t be much more clear when he told his disciples, “All nations will be gathered before the Son of Man, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from his goats.

You would need to deny everything Christ the King or Jesus the Good Shepherd has done for you if you want to believe you are a sheep and will be sorted into the kingdom of heaven because of how well you have done your job like the livestock which did better than others did. If you think the last Sunday of the church year should be about you rather than Christ the King then you would have to rewrite scripture and replace every pronoun "I" referring to God with name. But without exception, it is the shepherd who actively seeks sheep, rescues sheep, feeds sheep, brings back sheep, binds up injured sheep, and saves sheep as you heard from the reading from Ezekiel. You would have to deny as we confess in the Apostles Creed that we believe in Jesus Christ who will come again and judge the living and the dead. But as offended as you may be at a God who judges, there is a great comfort in knowing that Christ the King does not judge how well you have done, but a judge who has not forgotten you.

Jesus doesn't sort the sheep from the goats because they have better memories. When the sheep were told that of all the things they had done, they didn't remember doing anything. And in the same way, when the goats were told what they failed to do, they had no memory of failing to do anything.

The purpose of Christ the King Sunday is not to leave you wondering if you are a sheep or a goat. We hear this lesson of sheep and goats not only at the end of the church year, but it is also told by Jesus as he nears the end of his life. Throughout this long season of Pentecost that comes to a close today, we have heard how the good shepherd has fed multitudes, given water to the thirsty, and has cared for people that others ignored. The good shepherd has given us many good examples to remember.

On Christ the King Sunday, we remember the good shepherd who has remembered us. Christ the King who has prepared a kingdom for you from the foundation of the world. Christ the King, the son of Man who became the lamb of God so that you are given his inheritance. An inheritance that cannot be earned by doing anything or by memorizing a list of your accomplishments. An inheritance that is yours because Christ the King has never forgotten that you are his. An inheritance that is yours today. An inheritance that we surely ought to give thanks and praise to Christ the King. Amen