

November 26 – December 2, 2017

Advent's weekly Bible Challenge is based upon the readings assigned for each Sunday. The Basic challenge is to re-read the texts that were read on Sunday morning and included in the Sunday bulletin. You may want to recall how the passages were incorporated into the sermon. The Adventure and Explorer challenges are suggestions to deepen your knowledge of the Bible. The challenge is organized as one reading for each of five days, but find a pace or style that fits your schedule.

INTRODUCTION

The gospel reading for the final Sunday of the church year, Christ the King Sunday, 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 awaiting 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.

DAY ONE: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Since 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.

Adventure Challenge: Ezekiel 34.

Explorer Challenge: Use the internet or standard references to learn the historical background for this prophesy; in what ways had Israel's kings been bad shepherds?

DAY TWO: Psalm 95:1-7a

A call to approach God with thanksgiving and reverence celebrates God's creative power and authority.

- ¹Come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation.
- ²Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving
and raise a loud shout to the LORD with psalms.
- ³For you, LORD, are a great God,
and a great ruler above all gods.
- ⁴In your hand are the caverns of the earth;
the heights of the hills are also yours.
- ⁵The sea is yours, for you made it,
and your hands have molded the dry land.
- ⁶Come, let us worship and bow down,

let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

^{7a}For the LORD is our God,
and we are the people of God's pasture
and the sheep of God's hand.

Adventure Challenge: Psalm 95. (Note the important change with verse 7b.)

Explorer Challenge: Option A. Read this psalm as a liturgy used in a ceremony to call people within the temple to begin worship. Which words might be spoken or sung by a chief priest, assistants, groups of people? **Option B.** Consider the implications of the image that we are sheep in God's pasture; in context with verse 6, does our being sheep suggest we have rights, privileges, obligations? What are sheep allowed to do?

DAY THREE: 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 both of 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.

Adventure Challenge: Ephesians 1.

Explorer Challenge: Research one of the interesting phrases in this text; examples: *eyes of your heart; a spirit of wisdom and revelation; rule and authority and power and dominion; the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

DAY FOUR: 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."

Adventure Challenge: Matthew 25. (This is our third week on this chapter about the second coming.)

Explorer Challenge: *Option A.* Research *Parousia*. *Option B.* This is the third parable in Matthew 25 about the kingdom of heaven; how is the focus or message different in each of the parables?

DAY FIVE:

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.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David.
(*Mark 11:9*)

Adventure Challenge: This week's readings picture the reign of God. Consider which of these images (or another image) most appeals to you as the way God rules now or in the future?

Explorer Challenge: On this final Sunday of the church year, reflect on where this year has taken you on your faith journey. Where have you grown? Any surprises?