

Sermon 11-26-2017
Christ the King Sunday
By
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It's New Years' Eve! Well, in the church, that is. Christ the King Sunday is the last Sunday of the church year, which begins with Advent next Sunday. This is the day that we remember who rules. And today we start with praise of that name.

Psalm 95:1-7a

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It's kind of appropriate that this song has the word "thanksgiving" in it. We just had a whole lot of turkey a few days ago, and we have given thanks for all that we have received. Of course, thanksgiving involves giving thanks to someone. It's not just throwing thanks out into the ether. The one that we are called to thank is our King, the Lord. He is the one that provides for us, creates for us, and takes care of us. He gives us our daily bread, or daily turkey, as the case may be. But there's an interesting dimension to that, and verse 7 hints at it. We are "the flock under his care". What does that flock look like? Jesus told us about it.

Matthew 25:31-46

One thing for us to know: this is not a parable. Jesus says things like "will sit," or "will say" in this. He is actually describing the future. What does the future of the flock look like?

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We've heard this reading before. It's a pretty famous image in the church: the sheep on the right hand of God, and the goats on the left hand. But there are a few points that I think get glossed over here. First, we focus so much on the sheep and the goats being separated that we miss verse 32: all the nations will be gathered before him. The sheep and the goats are all mixed together at the start of this. That's the flock we're talking about. In the Small Catechism, it tells us that God provides daily bread to all people, though sinful. The flock is all of this world. And the start of this is right now. When you look at sheep and goats together, it's hard to tell the difference. They're all jumbled together. It's kind of like finding a panda amongst all these snowmen. Things look so similar from the outside that we can't tell the difference. BTW, panda's here. The only way that this separation can be done is with eyes on the inside. And the only one with eyes enough to be on the inside is the King. He is the one who sees the difference.

And this is borne out in the reactions of the sheep and the goats to what the King tells them. Compare verses 37-39 and verse 44. The sheep say, "Lord, when did we see you?" The goats say "when did we see you?" Both of them don't see Jesus in their neighbors. Usually, preachers who come to this story make the move of "we need to see Jesus in our neighbors, so that we serve them." But here's the trouble with that: the sheep, the ones who are entering into God's inheritance, don't see him. How can I stand up here and tell you to see him when the Scripture tells us you won't see him?

But the sheep and the goats do see something different. And God sees something different, because that's how he does the separation. The sheep "see" the hungry. The sheep "see" the thirsty. The sheep "see" the strangers, and the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. The goats do not. Oh, they may have realized that such people are out there. They may have understood that there are such people out there. But the goats don't "see" them. I'm using "see" in a more abstract way here. You can see things out in the world, and they don't really have any impact on you. I like to think that's how I respond to billboards. But when you "see" something or someone, it changes you, deep inside. It brings you compassion, or anger, or frustration, or joy, or any number of emotions. That's the "seeing" that I am talking about, and I think, that God is talking about. And not only does that "seeing" bring emotions or change inside of you, it also bring action outside of you.

Because what's the main difference between the sheep and the goats? The sheep act, the goats don't. Now, here's the easy next jump to make that's completely wrong. "Well, since the sheep are the ones that act, I have to act in order to be a sheep." Wrong! We get so caught up in the word "for" that Jesus uses, that we forget something. Sheep do not change into goats, or vice versa. The action does not *determine* who they are, the action comes *from* who they are. Because they are sheep, because we are sheep, because we are those who have been called by the name of God and blessed by the Father, we see people. We see the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger. We have compassion for them, just as God has had compassion on us. We see them because God has given us his eyes. And when this end comes, where the sheep and the goats are separated, that's when Jesus' work really begins.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

And it all starts in one place: his resurrection from the dead.

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God is all in all. That's something to be thankful for. AMEN.