

Notes for Next Sunday

Last Sunday of the Church Year

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24). Having dealt with the faithless shepherds (vv. 1–10), the Lord committed himself to shepherd his flock. Judah had been led into exile in Babylon because of their sins. Now the Lord will provide true shepherds to lead them back from this exile. As in the lost sheep parable God will go bring back the lost sheep. He will restore them to the Promised Land where He will establish justice so that the fat sheep will not push the lean sheep from the food He will provide. The Lord will also send the ultimate Good Shepherd, Jesus.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). In this reading Paul emphatically says that Christ has indeed been raised! Paul then does a back and forth comparison between Adam and Christ as to sin and redemption. In Christ there is a resounding victory for all Christians. God has put everything under Christ's feet symbolizing total and forever conquest of everything including death the last enemy.

Gospel (Matthew 25:31-46). On the Last Day, Jesus will separate true believers from hypocrites and those who reject Him. The faithful will be vindicated and welcomed into heaven, while unbelievers will be condemned. Having received forgiveness through faith in Christ, God's flock eagerly await the day on which they shall be publicly vindicated and receive eternal life. (TLSB)

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹²As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ²⁰“Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²²I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.

34:12 from all the places. Babylon was not the only place where the Israelites had gone. (CSB)

34:13 their own land. Israel, land flowing with milk and honey, was given to them solely by God's grace and according to His promises. Our “own land” is heaven, which God will give to us by His grace. We too are foreigners and exiles on earth, for our citizenship is in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:16 the sleek and the strong. This verse is a good example of the biblical theme of the Great Reversal, like Lk 1:53: “He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:21 shove...butt. When leaders abuse their high calling, the people begin to abuse one another. Then the weak are taken advantage of. (PBC)

34:23 my servant David. † A ruler like David and from his line. Under great David’s greater Son there would be one flock, one Shepherd who will feed them with the bread from heaven. (CSB)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. ²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

15:20 firstfruits. The first sheaf of the harvest given to the Lord (Lev 23:10–11, 17, 20) as a token that all the harvest belonged to the Lord and would be dedicated to him through dedicated lives. So Christ, who has been raised, is the guarantee of the resurrection of all of God’s redeemed people (cf. 1Th 4:13–18). (CSB)

15:24 the end. The second coming of Christ and all the events accompanying it. This includes his handing over the kingdom to the Father, following his destroying all dominion, authority and power of the persons and forces who oppose him. (CSB)

15:24 he hands over. Christ, as a conquering general, now wars against sin, death, and the power of the devil. He will present His conquest to His Father, who has given Him authority to wage this war (v 28). (TLSB)

15:25 . last enemy ... death. Contrary to notions of death as friendly and suicide as a solution, the Bible describes death as our enemy. The Lord created us for life, not death. Death is destroyed by the gift of eternal life in Christ. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and

clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ ⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

25:31 sit on his throne. Cf Dn 7:13–14, where the Son of Man is presented as holy but never actually sits on heaven’s throne. Here, the Son of Man sits in glory as God. (TLSB)

25:32 nations will be gathered before him. Sheep and goats are not described as being judged on this day, but rather separated. Accordingly, this parable is not primarily about judgment but about the revelation and public vindication of true believers. (TLSB)

25:33 sheep on his right and goats on his left. In the ancient world, the right hand was regularly associated with privilege or honor. (TLSB)

25:34–40 Rewards in the kingdom of heaven are given to those who serve without thought of reward. There is no hint of merit here, for God gives out of grace, not debt. (CSB)

25:41 prepared for the devil. Hell was not prepared for human beings. Those who reject the Lord will go there because the wicked cannot stay with the righteous. (TLSB)

25:42–43 The undone works are only a symptom of the real problem: lack of faith. If they had called on the Lord in faith, He would have forgiven them, prepared them, and completed good works in them. (TLSB)