

Lectionary A November 23, 2014 Christ the King Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Roberta Meyer

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
Psalm 95:1-7a
Ephesians 1:15-23
Matthew 25:31-46

Surprise!

Why do we always get surprised by God? I mean we say God is in our lives and in all we do and then when it is obvious that is exactly what is happening we are surprised. Like the other day at the Mission of Grace. A lady called on the phone and explained that she didn't have an appointment, but that she had been in the hospital for a week and she and her husband had no food or anything else. Could she please send her husband in for some food and supplies? Of course she could. Then she called back saying he was on his way and could we please give him some toilet paper and paper towels. I told her yes on the toilet paper, but when I checked the shelves, we had no paper towels. Sorry.

I no sooner hung up the phone and a lady from the Fresh Air Community Church, the folks that worship here on Thursdays, came in to the Mission carrying in several bags of paper towels. Now, that surprised me. I knew it was God's work, and it surprised me.

Why was I surprised? I don't know. Is it because the King of the Universe cared that one woman who needs paper towels gets what she needs? Paper towels aren't really dire needs. Is that what surprises me? The King of the Universe, sitting up there on a throne surrounded by angels has the time while looking after the whole cosmos to be concerned about the little details that make our lives more comfortable.

So, about these sheep and goats in the Gospel reading for today—seems to me they both got surprised by the King, too. The sheep's shocked response was, "When did we...?" And those goats responded equally stunned, "Lord, when didn't we...?" They weren't surprised by the Son of Man describing their actions, neither group denied whether they took care of their poor neighbors or not. Both the sheep and the goats were fully aware of their treatment of the poor, hungry, cold critters they met. No, the thing that surprised them was that they didn't recognize Jesus in those places. Or, to be more accurate, they were flabbergasted that Jesus, the Son of Man, actually spent his time in such lowly places, with the riffraff of society. ¹

¹ David Lose, 11-2014

When we think about Christ the King Sunday, we think about the very first part of this Gospel story. *“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. All the nations will be gathered before him...”*²

This sure doesn't sound like there would be much time for Christ the King to spend time with the sort of folk that society deems worthless. So the sheep and the goats were both on the same wave length here. It didn't occur to either group that Jesus would be anywhere near those pitiful souls. Let alone that he was those very people.

So what's the big deal here? Why such a contrast in the reaction of the Son of Man to the two groups? Remember, this is one of Jesus' parables. And what does he like to do with these parables? Shake us up. Make us think. **So while we are all wondering if we are sheep or goats, Jesus has us thinking about who He really is.**

After all, look where Jesus was born. He came into this world in a barn surrounded by shepherds, who by the way were not the most desirable members of society. They spent their lives with sheep after all. Don't imagine their odor was conducive to attracting many friends. His mother was an unwed teenage peasant girl. As a man he placed himself right smack in the middle of the lives of the most desperate people, the ones no one else would be caught with, the lepers, the prostitutes, sinners, cheaters... his last words of love were to a thief hanging on the cross next to him. *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*³

It occurred to me that while we are concerned in this parable that Jesus is separating the sheep from the goats, maybe what is really happening is that we are separating Jesus from who he really is. He never came to sit high on a throne distant from our stuff. No, he is right here in the lives every one of his children. He exists to be in all we do. His passion is to be where our hurt is the most painful, whether that be hunger, loneliness, depression, addiction, abuse. So why are we surprised when we see Jesus in these places?

These sheep and goats—what's the difference in them? They both were just being themselves. I think the main reason the sheep came out on top in this story is because they are totally dependent on their shepherd.

Goats by nature are more independent, on their own. While sheep are pretty helpless without a shepherd. So what were these sheep doing? They were doing what their shepherd does. They were feeding the hungry, quenching the thirst of the parched, welcoming the strangers. They were putting clothes on the naked and visiting the sick and the ones in prison. They were not thinking about the kingdom of heaven at all. They were just following the Shepherd. They were just being sheep.

In our Ephesians text we hear Paul's prayer for his friends, *“I 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, so 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, and*

² NRSV

³ NRSV

what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”⁴

There is an oxymoron here. Because the wisdom Paul is praying that we receive is to be dumb sheep. The revelation he wants for the followers of Jesus is to not figure things out on our own, but to just follow in Jesus’ footsteps. The riches of Jesus Christ’s glorious inheritance and the immeasurable greatness of his power is best lived right smack in the middle of the where God’s children are the poorest. Maybe God delights in surprising us. Let’s look for these surprise visits from Jesus in the people we meet as we go about our everyday affairs. And let’s just do what our shepherd does.

We are surprised at the Mission of Grace. We are delighted when we meet Jesus in Sarge, the homeless guy who comes to eat at our meals. And when a family who hasn’t eaten for three days is thrilled with our food offerings on a cold Tuesday evening, Jesus is right there scarfing down every crumb.

And last week I was honored to give Jesus an Indianapolis Colts toboggan. Yes, see, at the October meal, this little fellow, about 8 years old was eating beside me. I was telling him and his family about the meals coming in November and December. I told him that in December there would be surprises. He asked what kind. “Well, they wouldn’t be surprises if I told you. But what kind of surprises do you want?”

“Will there be hats?”

“What kind of hats?”

“Colts hats with a fuzzy ball on top.”

After the meal, I shared this story with the workers there that evening. A lady from one of the other churches working that evening slipped me some money and told me to use it to help pay for a Colts hat for that little boy.

So I bought the hat and since it was so cold last week, I just couldn’t wait until Christmas to give it to him. He was so excited! He was surprised and so was I. That is the message for today. Our King who surprised the world by dying on the cross and rising from the dead because of his love for us—he meets us in the lives of little boys who are thrilled with the gift of a warm “Colts” hat with a fuzzy ball on top.

Bring your prayers up this week for those who need a glimpse of Jesus in their lives. These prayers will be offered when the prayer group meets this week. And as we offer Thanksgiving for our blessings on Thursday, and enter the season of Advent, I invite you to take the Ephesians text that is on the bookmark in your bulletin (*attached to this sermon*) and pray this prayer every day for all your friends and especially for all who worship together at Grace and Peace. Let’s pray these oxymorons that our wisdom will be as dumb sheep just being who we are created to

⁴ NRSV

be. Going along in life serving each other, meeting Jesus in each other's pain and joy, being surprised when Jesus smiles at us and hugs us with dirty, grimy hands. Amen.



**Prayer for Grace and
Peace
Throughout Advent**

I 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, so 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. Ephesians 1:17-19