

Sermon- Christ the King Sunday- November 25<sup>th</sup> 2018- OSLC  
Text- Matthew 25:31-46

Sheep/ Goats or Shoats

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. We begin our rather hectic, busy season here in Northeast Wisconsin. Today is Christ the King Sunday, next week we begin Advent. The deer hunting season is over. We welcome back most of the male population of Neenah. The combined stock of Miller and Anhauser Busch has increased significantly. Appleton had its annual Christmas parade last Tuesday, kicking off the tumultuous, frantic shopping season. We gathered here on Wednesday for our Thanksgiving Services where we challenged ourselves to be people who give thanks by giving to others. But today, we focus on Christ the King Sunday.

You might be surprised that this day has a relatively short history. It doesn't date to the early church or the Middle Ages. It was started in Italy by the Roman Catholic Church. It began about 1925 as a reaction to Benito Mussolini's rise to power. The church at the time was trying to remind people that there is only ONE King. That is Christ. Not a despot. Christ is in charge, Christ would have the power, the last word.

It's a little hard for most of us to wrap our arms around the metaphor of a King. We no longer live in a world where kings and queens rule unless you consider our political environment or our extreme fascination with the day to day happenings of the royal family in Great Britain. The last king that I happened to see personally was at the Syttende Mai parade in Brooklyn in the 1950's. Norwegian Independence Day parade. King Haakon the VII was marching in the parade. I thought to myself, big deal. He looked like a normal Norwegian to me- you know- handsome, muscular, tall, just what a person from the Holy Land would look like. Yes it's hard to understand the concept of a King.

But, back to the Gospel. It's a classic text. The king will separate the people much like separating the sheep and the goats. Again, unless you grew up in a farm household, the concept of sheep and goats is foreign to you. Where I grew up we had an absence of sheep grazing and goats foraging. In order for me to even see

sheep and goats I had to travel to the Bronx Zoo. However, the people at the time of Jesus did have a first hand knowledge about sheep and goats.

Here is what they knew:

-Sheep follow the voice of the shepherd. They trust him to lead them to food, water and safety. If they wander, as some do, the shepherd will go out and rescue them and bring them back to the safety of the flock.

-Goats are headstrong. They don't follow anyone. Think of it this way.

If we are allowing ourselves to be led, being sensitive to the pull of God's spirit, and following the path of the Good Shepherd, we are sheep. If we are headstrong, going our own way, and pulling back against God's spirit, we are goats. So, which one are you?

Then, most interesting, is that neither the righteous or the unrighteousness have any idea where or when they have seen the King! They both say, "When did we see you"? And the King tells the sheep and the goats, I'm exactly where I've always been. Ever since the beginning I've been aligned with the people you considered the "least of these". If you are looking for me, look where you have always seen me to be - among the poor, the sick, the hungry, and the neglected. Any time you take care of your neighbor in need you are face to face with me.

So where do we fit in this parable. Are we sheep or goats? Maybe we are Shoats. Sometimes we recognize God in our neighbors and serve them, other times we fail in that task. Saints/ Sinners.

A story:

An old Rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the days had begun.

"Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you see an animal in the distance and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?"

"No," answered the Rabbi.

Another asked, "Is it when you look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a peach tree?"

"No," answered the Rabbi.

"Then what is it?" the pupils demanded.

"It is when you look on the face of any man or woman and see that it is your sister or brother. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

So today let's not focus on whether or not we are sheep or goats. Look up and see who's sitting on the throne. It's the face of the Good Shepherd looking at you. Not a king in a Norwegian Independence Day parade but the King who loves you, understands you, forgives you, and the King who calls you "beloved child."

It is my prayer that as we reflect upon such extravagant grace, we will find our lives overflowing with gratitude and joy for such a king. May that gratitude show itself in our eagerly tending to those whom Jesus identified - who? Anyone in need.

Amen- Let it be so.