



"The Good Shepherd"

Christ the King Sunday
Saturday and Sunday, November 25 and 26, 2017
All Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

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

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This week the newspapers delighted in the death of Charles Manson. The New York Post had as their headline "EVIL DEAD, make room, Satan: Charles Manson is finally going to hell." The killing spree in two days of August 1969 shocked this country. It was organized by Manson and carried out by his cult of followers known as the Manson Family. The Manson Family accepted him as their spiritual leader, their shepherd, and he manipulated them mentally, physically, and spiritually. For the last fifty years Charlie has been known as a metaphor for evil. Before Manson religious cults were seen as just being kind of kooky and weird, dressing funny with strange unorthodox beliefs, but after Manson's family cults were seen as downright scary and sinister.

In 1978 in Jonestown, Guiana, over 900 followers of Jim Jones committed suicide. The Branch Davidians in '93, David Koresh, and his followers had a shootout with the ATF and FBI. In '97 Marshall Applewhite with his Heaven's Gate cult committed suicide because they believed that somehow there was an alien spacecraft behind the Hale-Bopp Comet and they were going to be transported up to it in death.

And then more recently we've seen articles and TV shows about Scientology invited by a science fiction writer Ron Hubbard. Cult leaders exercise unyielding control to a sense of exclusivity and special knowledge that only those who are inside the cult get it. And that control and submission demands total obedience. And they attempt to both isolate the individuals as well as deconstruct those important social relationships that they have, especially with family and friends.

There's a loss of critical thinking in the group that they are unable to work through problems as they see them being exhibited in the cult and their cult leader becomes almost like a god. These false shepherds lead people astray and ultimately, they will destroy lives.

During the 6th Century B.C. the Israelites were exiled into slave by the Babylon Empire. The Prophet Ezekiel spoke out against the Jewish kings who had gotten them into this predicament. Those kings were to be shepherds who should have cared for and protected the Israelites, their people, from this situation. Instead they neglected their flock and only looked out for themselves. In impetuous and descriptive language Ezekiel prophesied that God himself now will lead his people. He will be their good shepherd. And what does the good shepherd do? Again, Ezekiel offers beautiful language; "He will search for the lost. He will seek the scattered. He will rescue and protect them from trouble. He will bring them out to the places where they can find nourishment for the souls. He will feed them from his

abundance. He will lead them to pasture, he will make them lie down so that they can rest from their tragedies. He will bring them back, He will bind up the wounds, He will strengthen them, the good shepherd will save them through a savior a descendant of King David. And he will judge them."

Jesus in the gospel of Matthew depicts a last judgement when the son of man will as a shepherd separate the goats from the sheep. He will separate the good from the evil, the holy from the bad, the righteous from the unrighteous. Judgement will be for all nations, that's everybody. From the upstanding citizen and church goer to the atheist, murderous, cult leader, judgment is for everybody no one gets to sit this one out. No one gets a hall pass.

And Jesus lays out the conditions for the eternal exile that will befall those from God's presence. And what were the great sins of the unrighteous? Do they follow in the ways of false followers like Charles Manson? Do they engage and deprave acts like murder or deceit or betrayal or lying? No, it's not what they did that condemns them, but what they didn't do. What they neglected to do that damns them to all eternity.

Their horrible crime is simply that they hadn't cared for the basic needs of their neighbor, food, water, hospitality, clothing, special care. To not feed a starving person is to kill them. To not offer a cold cup of clean water is to condemn a person to sickness and disease and ultimately death. To not welcome a stranger is to not welcome Jesus himself.

When Jesus describes in this passage these acts of mercies that people can do every single day of their life, they don't depend on wealth, they don't depend on ability, they don't depend on special skill or intelligence. They are simple acts freely given and freely received. There is no special talent; no call to ministry is needed.

Recently I read the story of Kate McClure. Kate was driving outside of Philadelphia on I-95 when she ran out of gas. She made it off of the exit and found herself in a real sketchy neighborhood. She was approached by a homeless veteran, a Marine, Johnny Bobbitt, who told her to stay in her car and to lock her doors, and that he would return. About 15 or 20 minutes later he returned with a small red gas can. He had used the last \$20 that he had to fill up her tank so that this young woman could get on her way and make it home. Over time Kate and her fiancé established a relationship with Johnny and would bring him food and clothes, money and supplies. Recently she decided to start up a *Go Fund Me* page and as of today she has raised over \$300,000 for rent and services for Johnny so that he can have a new start. She raised so much money that Johnny is now planning on giving some of it away so that he can help another person.

In Matthews gospel sharing food, clothing and kindness is just as important as sharing the gospel. C.S. Lewis said of this passage, *"The rule for all of us is fairly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you do."* The genuine love of Jesus is lived out in the genuine loving of his people for others in Jesus kind of self-giving love is possible for every single one of us. Like Jesus said to the rich man before in Matthew, *"With God, all things are possible."*

As we reflect on this, Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday in our church year and on these passages, that are before us, we recognize that now is the time for salvation. Now is the time for people to help people with generosity and kindness. For doing so we honor Christ our

King, our Good Shepherd, who cares for and leads his flock, the widow, the orphan, the hungry, the poor, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the stranger, the naked and the sick.

As Ezekiel said, "*The Lord has spoken.*" To those who hear this gospel, really hear it and to seek to live their lives by a second chance is given by our Good Shepherd King. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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