

LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTACOST 11/22/20

EZEKIEL 34:11-16 20-24; PSALM 95:1-7a; EPHESIANS 1:15-23;

MATTHEW 25:31-46

GOOD MORNING

OUR READINGS THIS MORNING ARE ABOUT JESUS'S SOVEREIGNTY. THIS SUNDAY IS ALSO KNOWN AS CHRIST THE KING OR REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY THAT REVEAL WHAT THE WORLD WILL BE LIKE WHEN JESUS' SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL IS ACCOMPLISHED, AND HE SITS "ON THE THRONE OF HIS GLORY". THIS IS A COSMIC VISION IN WHICH JESUS IDENTIFIED HIMSELF WITH THE SUFFERING OF THE WORLD AND PROCLAIMS FINAL JUDGMENT.

DURING THE TIME OF EZEKIEL, GOD'S PEOPLE WERE SCATTERED IN THE EXILE, WHICH THE PROPHET ATTRIBUTED IN LARGE MEASURE TO THE FAILED LEADERSHIP OF ISRAEL'S KINGS. BUT THE LORD WILL SEARCH FOR THE LOST SHEEP, GATHER THEM TOGETHER AND BRING THEM BACK TO THEIR OWN LAND. IN CONTRAST TO THE PREDATORY LEADERS OF ISRAEL, THE LORD WILL STRENGTHEN AND PROTECT THE FLOCK, HEAL THE SICK,

BIND UP THE INJURED, SEARCH FOR THOSE WHO HAVE STRAYED, AND PROVIDE SUSTENANCE.

BUT IN ADDITION TO SEEKING OUT THE LOST AND INJURED, THE LORD WILL ALSO INSURE JUSTICE BY DESTROYING THOSE WHO HAD GAINED PROSPERITY AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS. THEY WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE ILLS THAT THEY HAVE ALLOWED TO OCCUR. "I WILL FEED THEM WITH JUSTICE." IN LIKE MANNER, THE LORD GIVES WARNING OF JUDGMENT TO THE FLOCK ITSELF. IN VOWING TO "JUDGE BETWEEN SHEEP AND SHEEP, BETWEEN RAMS AND GOATS", THE LORD DECLARES THAT THE PEOPLE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR.

THE REPEATED USE OF THE FIRST PERSON PRONOUN FOR GOD SHOWS THAT THE LORD IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN SECURING THE PEOPLE'S WELFARE, IN THE SAME WAY THAT JESUS IDENTIFIED SO STRONGLY WITH THE UNFORTUNATE.

IN THE CONTEXT OF EZEKIEL TIME, THIS PASSAGE REFLECTS A YEARNING FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE DAVIDIC MONARCHY FOLLOWING THE RETURN FROM EXILE. IN A DIVINE SENCE OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE, THESE WORDS

SET THE SCENE FOR THE INCARNATION OF JESUS AND THE FURTHER PROMISE OF HIS SECOND COMING AT WHICH INDIVIDUALS WILL BE CALLED INTO ACCOUNT.

THE PROMISSORY NATURE OF EXEKIEL'S FOREWARNINGS EXPRESSES WHAT GOOD LEADERSHIP LOOKS LIKE – IN GOVERNMENT, IN CORPORATIONS, ALL THROUGH THE PRIVATE SECTOR. THAT RULES CONSIST IN SEEKING THE LOST; BRINGING BACK THE STRAYED; BINDING UP THE INJURED; STRENGTHENING THE WEAK; FEEDING THE HUNGRY, IN A WORD, GOOD LEADERSHIP CONSISTS IN THE RESTORATION OF THE COMMON GOOD SO THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY, STRONG AND WEAK, RICH AND POOR, MAY LIVE TOGETHER IN COMMON BROTHERHOOD OF SHARED RESOURCES.

THE THEME OF LAST WEEKS GOSPEL WAS THE TRAGEDY OF LOST OPPORTUNITY. IN PENTACOST 24, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS MISSED THE CHANCE TO MODEL HUMILITY TO THE PEOPLE.

AND TODAY, WE ENCOUNTER THE REMARKABLE IMAGE OF THE SON OF MAN COME IN HIS GLORY TO JUDGE THE

NATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS IN LIGHT OF HOW THEY USED THEIR OPPORTUNITIES ON EARTH. OFFERED MANY CHANCES TO PRACTICE CHARITY TOWARD THEIR NEEDY NEIGHBORS, THEY EITHER DID OR DID NOT RESPOND. IN THE STORY – FOR SURELY THE “BLACK AND WHITE” CONTRAST PORTRAYED HERE IS MORE A WARNING, WITH STARKLY CONTRASTING SYMBOLIC FIGURES, THAN A DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPLEXITIES OF SERVANTHOOD – THE “SHEEP” ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR THEM; WHILE THE “GOATS” ARE CONDEMNED TO ETERNAL FIRE. IN TERMS OF THE TELLING, APPARENTLY NEITHER THE SHEEP NOR THE GOATS WERE AWARE THAT DURING THEIR LIFETIMES THEY WERE BEING JUDGED BY HOW THEY RESPONDED TO THE HUNGRY, THE THIRSTY, THE STRANGER, AND THE PRISONER – ALL THOSE FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS WHOM THEY COULD NOTICE OR IGNORE; WHOM THEY COULD LOVE AND SERVE; OR ABOUT WHOM THEY COULD REMAIN INDIFFERANT.

“WE DIDN’T KNOW, LORD!” THEY CRY. AND THE SON OF MAN ANSWERS IN EFFECT “WELL, YOU KNOW NOW!”

**AN ANONYMOUS AUTHOR HAS PARAPHRASED THE VOICES
OF THE NEGLECTED AS:**

***I WAS HUNGRY AND YOU FORMED A HUMANITIES CLUB TO
DISCUSS MY HUNGER. THANK YOU.***

***I WAS IMPRISONED AND YOU CREPT OFF QUIETLY TO YOUR
CHAPEL TO PRAY FOR MY RELEASE. NICE***

***I WAS NAKED AND IN YOUR MIND YOU DEBATED THE
MORALITY OF MY APPEARANCE. WHAT GOOD DID THAT DO?***

***I WAS SICK AND YOU KNELT AND THANKED GOD FOR YOUR
HEALTH. BUT I NEEDED YOU.***

***I WAS HOMELESS AND YOU PREACHED TO ME OF THE
SHELTER OF THE LOVE OF GOD. I WISH YOU'D TAKEN ME
HOME.***

***I WAS LONELY AND YOU LEFT ME ALONE TO PRAY FOR ME.
WHY DIDN'T YOU STAY?***

***YOU SEEM SO HOLY, SO CLOSE TO GOD: BUT I'M STILL
HUNGRY, LONELY, COLD, AND STILL IN PAIN.***

**I WILL CLOSE WITH THIS: RICHARD ROHR IN *THE DIVINE
DANCE: THE TRINITY AND YOUR TRANSFORMATION* WROTE:**

HERE IS THE REMEDY WHEN YOU FIND IT HARD TO EXEMPLIFY HEAVEN NOW: LET LOVE HAPPEN. REMEMBER, YOU CANNOT “GET THERE”; YOU CAN ONLY BE HERE. LOVE IS JUST LIKE PRAYER; IT IS NOT SO MUCH AN ACTION THAT WE DO BUT A REALITY THAT WE ALREADY ARE. WE DON’T DECIDE TO “BE LOVING.” THE FATHER DOESN’T DECIDE TO LOVE THE SON. FATHERHOOD IS THE FLOW FROM FATHER TO SON, 100 PERCENT. THE SON DOES NOT CHOOSE NOW AND THEN TO RELEASE SOME LOVE TO THE FATHER, OR TO THE SPIRIT. LOVE IS THEIR FULL MODUS OPERANDI! THE LOVE IN YOU – WHICH IS THE SPIRIT IN YOU – ALWAYS SOMEHOW SAYS YES. LOVE IS NOT SOMETHING YOU DO; LOVE IS SOMEONE YOU ARE. IT IS YOUR TRUE SELF. LOVE IS WHERE YOU COME FROM AND LOVE IS WHERE YOU ARE GOING. AMEN