

“Back to the Basics Part III: Christian Identity With a Grateful Heart”

“Thankful for the Past, Present and Future”

We are finishing our three part sermon series, “Back to the Basics”. As we finish looking at our “Christian Identity with a Grateful Heart”, we focus on what it means as Christian to have Christ as our King. Often the Sunday after Thanksgiving begins the Christian New Year with the season of Advent. But this year is one of those odd years when Advent is still another week away. Our culture has plunged head first into the Christmas season. We are out of step and that may not be a bad thing. It may be that waiting, not only a week to begin Advent, but taking the entire season and not rushing things will bring us to a new depth of faith and love and hope. So we wait and we try and understand what it means to worship Christ the King and be part of the reign of God. ---Pastor Cindy

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon: **“Thankful for the Past, Present and Future”**

Prayer for the Week

Most holy God, by your Spirit encouraging us, and the love of Christ enabling us, may we worship you with the enthusiasm born of true love. We join our voices with the millions who this day praise the name of Jesus from every nation on earth, and with the great host of heavenly souls whose praise and love fills the universe and flows far beyond all time and space. Glory be to you forever! Through Christ our King. Amen! (Bruce D. Prewer)

Study Guide

Monday, 11/27/17 Ezekiel 34: 11-16

Ezekiel had been prophesying against the “shepherds” of Israel in the beginning of the chapter. The shepherds (prophets and priests) had not been taking care of the people of Israel and God was angry and condemned them. So, this reading takes up where God promises to be the shepherd, the good shepherd for Israel (sound familiar?). This is a beautiful passage where God is promising to seek out the lost, the lonely, the ill and the outcast and care for them and not just care, but offer justice. Kings and rulers offer justice and as we end the Christian year, it is important to remember that we will be preparing for the birth of a shepherd king, a caring king, a king of justice and righteousness. Today, spend some time in prayer being cared for by the Shepherd who seeks you and loves you.

This week's sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Tuesday, 11/28/17 Ezekiel 34: 17-24

Here is the judgment against those who have only sought their own self-interest and ignored their flock. God is judging and is sending another shepherd who will feed the flock and care for them and be a prince over them. He speaks of David, but David has been gone a long time. Ezekiel is promising a new ruler who will, like David be a shepherd that cares for his sheep and brings justice, for God promises it will be so. We are still waiting for the final fulfillment of that promise although we have seen a glimpse of it in Jesus. As we prepare for the season of Advent, we are reminded that we are not the first people to long for the coming of the Prince of Peace, the Shepherd that feeds his flock. Today, take some time for prayer, for yourself, for the people you love, for the world, for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

Wednesday, 11/29/17 Matthew 25: 31-33

This parable comes in the middle of what we now call Holy Week. Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last time before he will be betrayed, tried and crucified. He has been challenged by religious authorities and has called them out for their less than stellar behavior. Sounds a lot like Ezekiel and the shepherds of Israel. This is the third in the twenty fifth chapter. First is the ten maidens some who remembered oil and some who did not. The unprepared ones were left out of the wedding. That is immediately followed by the parable of the talents, the one who did nothing is the one who is left out. This story, is about the end of time, when the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God will be judging all nations. He separates out the sheep from the goats and blesses the sheep. It is often hard for us to read about the separation and judgment. Tomorrow we will read about exactly what is required for blessing. Today, say a prayer that you might be open to what the Ruler of Heaven and Earth would have you do as his servant.

Thursday, 11/30/17 Matthew 25: 34-40

Here it is: Jesus claims that those who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, cloth the naked, visit the sick and those in prison are the righteous ones. Those who he welcomed were confused? When had they seen Jesus like that? Any time and anywhere you do something for the least, the lonely, the lost, the outcast, the prisoner, the poor, the forgotten, the sick, each act is like ministering to Jesus. On the one hand this seems so easy, on the other, it is easy to not do things for many reasons: we don't trust the stranger, we are afraid, we are not sure they deserve the help. However, Jesus' words are clear...what we do for those not like us, those who are struggling and hurting, we do to Jesus. This is the challenge for our day. This is the challenge for our life. If we would enter the kingdom of heaven, we are called to ministry on earth. Today, do something for someone who cannot repay you, or gather food for a pantry, or clothing for a shelter. Bring a coat or a blanket to Operation Holiday. May your actions be a prayer.

Friday, 12/01/17 Matthew 25: 41-46

These are some of the harshest words of Jesus. What the "goats" didn't do, is they neglected Jesus. When given an opportunity they turned a blind eye and had a cold heart. They were in a hurry and didn't think about the outcast, the lonely, the lost, the poor, or the hungry who deserved help. Whatever the reason, they chose not to be in ministry, and it cost them a place in the kingdom of heaven. It is hard, but Jesus had said again and again to follow. Compassion is a kingdom value, love for all is a kingdom value and this parable reminds us that it is what is required. As we prepare for the season of Advent, may each one of us have an open heart, compassion for all and a willingness to see Jesus in every one we meet. Today say a prayer as you prepare your heart and spirit not only for the Child who was born long ago, but the King who will one day return.