



Thirty fourth Sunday Christ the King 2005.

Ezekiel 34: 11-12 15-17 1Corinthians 15: 20-26,28 Matthew 25:31-46

The first reading and the Gospel have a common theme. Who should be the judge of all nations and peoples?

In the Gospel we have a judgement scene. Matthew uses a traditional account describing the judgement of Non-Jews. The picture is clear, the Son of Man is to be the judge. The Gentiles will be divided into two groups. The division will be made on specific criteria.

The background to Matthew's story was the belief, by the Jews, that at a future time God would punish those who, throughout history, had harmed the people of Israel. It was a belief that God would, at a future time, bring to completeness the people's hopes for an ultimate Messiah.

In the light of this tradition, and in the face of the persecution experienced by Christians, the story is reworked to show that there will be a future judgement meted out to those who have ill-treated Christians.

How do we understand this story for our times?

There were two questions that concerned the people.

1. By what criteria can non-Jews and non-Christians enter or be part of God's kingdom?
2. Is there a good reason to put up with suffering to bring the kingdom into being?

We will consider the first question. The answer is clear. Non-Jews and non-Christians will be judged by the same criteria as Christians and Jews.

The kingdom belongs to those who feed the hungry, who are hospitable to strangers, who visit prisons and hospitals, in other words those who care for others.

In this reading we see that God identifies himself with the sick, the imprisoned, the needy, the hungry and those on the margins of society.

The second point that is made is more subtle. It is that the so-called virtuous somehow have not grasped this vital point.

So the important truth in all this is, that membership of a special group will not determine how we stand before God, but rather our treatment of one another in God's name.

To be godly is to be active in God's concerns.

We began with the question, who should judge? The prophet Ezekiel uses the image of *Shepherd* to describe the leadership of Israel.

“Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.”

The shepherds have not been good shepherds. Therefore God will take back the role of leadership. God alone will be shepherd of Israel.

The title of today’s celebration is a reminder that all authority is a gift from God who shares his creative power with us. The title, King is a difficult one today as it carries a lot of baggage with it.

What model of kingship do you bring to mind on this day?

How does the Liturgy celebrate this day?

In the preface we read that God anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness as priest and king. The pictures give us an indication of how the church sees Christ’s kingship.

Priesthood is the gift of life for others. Kingship is first of all universal. The kingdom of God requires a leadership of truth and life, holiness and grace, justice love and peace.

All these words are descriptive of spiritual values. So the great biblical titles of priest, prophet and king are seen in Jesus and his followers, not as roles, but as virtues to be lived out according to our strengths.

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