Text: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

**Introduction**

It’s the Last Sunday of the Church year. A day that is typically given over to the last lines of the creed: “He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.” The Epistle and Gospel lesson talk about those things, and they have the benefit of being rather clear. When the time comes to be in earnest, Jesus and Paul don’t really mess around.

But it is the Old Testament lesson that I wish to focus upon today.

**Text**

Ezekiel is a late prophet of Southern Kingdom. He starts about 5 years before the fall of Jerusalem. He was of a priestly lineage, and rather tragically, the year he would have taken his place in the temple is the year it was destroyed. What he had been trained for his entire life was gone. Much of his early prophecy is simply recording and foretelling judgement upon all the ways the various leadership roles of Israel had betrayed them. The Kings were weak, stupid and corrupt. The Priests were corrupt and unbelieving. The prophets would say whatever the people wanted to hear. If there was a way to fail the people they were supposed to lead, they found it. They did indeed treat the people of Israel like livestock, sheep to be sheared and slaughtered for their own enrichment.

Now I’m not certain the comparison is completely fair, but I can definitely feel the vibes of Ezekiel. You don’t have to get dramatically political to recognize the difference between the leadership that landed on the moon and the leadership that has left us almost $34 Trillion in debt. And where did most of that go? Into various pockets in a variety of deniable ways. How else do offices that make about $150K per year leave office as multimillionaires? And did any of it help the American people?

1964 was the year of peak church membership. The former mainline churches accounted for roughly 65% of the population of the US in that year. The most recent numbers for those same denominations is 12%. What happened between those years? Largely the jettisoning of every historic doctrine led by the clergy of the denominations. Along with forgetting the doctrines went evangelism and the teaching of the faith and discipleship and spiritual disciplines. Also scores of abominations and acts that in a more just time would have required millstones. If these men feared God, the evidence is slight.

And what of prophets? We tended to prefer those who told us of the Dow reaching 36,000, or of eternal life though the singularity, or any of a ton of monorail schemes. Those that would tell us of peace, while we started more wars. Those that would tell of us the easy path. Those that would shout down the occasional Jeremiah’s that would warn of those paths as disturbers of the peace of Israel.

There are reasons the comparison is not fair, but the vibes can be felt.

**Christology**

And this is where Ezekiel is most dear. To those that had been fleeced and lead to the slaughter. To the smoldering wick and bruised reeds. God speaks. “Behold, Look, See, Perceive, Hear, whatever strong perception word gets you to look up for a moment. Behold, I, I myself, will search for my sheep and will seek them out.”

The repeated emphasis is upon the action of God Almighty. No longer imperfect servants. Which we are all imperfect servants in our own way. This sermon in the hands of another I’m sure could be directed against me. But God’s promise through Ezekiel is that God himself will be the shepherd that seeks out His sheep from wherever they have been scattered.

And on the day that he gathers his people as that good shepherd, he shall feed them.

And after feeding them, He shall give them good pasture.

And after giving them good pasture, he will bind the injured, and strengthen the weak, and destroy those who have made themselves fat and strong and shall stay with his people. “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.”

Now today in Christ some of this is realized. Even today, the gospel is not silent. If we have ears to hear we can find it. God continues to feed his people with his word. He continues to feed us with himself at this table. He gives us good pasture. And by word and sacrament he binds the injuries of sin – our own and others. By encouragement of many brothers and sisters he strengthens the weak. You might even find places strong enough to cast out those who would push and shoulder and thrust with horns.

These are all the works of the LORD in our midst. In Christ God keeps his promises. Because we do have one shepherd set over us and that is Christ.

**Eschatological**

 Of course some of this is not yet realized. “I, I myself, will judge between the fat and the lean sheep.” We await that final judgement.

“I will rescue my flock, they shall no longer be prey.” Today we live in the midst of the nations. Today, Satan will prowls like a lion. Today, even our own flesh seeks our destruction. Today we are still the prey of the Devil, the world and our sinful nature. But also today we have been given the victory in Christ. One little world dispels them.

But tomorrow, when the day of grace is over and the day of judgement comes, this world will melt away into the world to come. The rich pasture of the mountains of Israel. And Satan shall be cast out eternally. And we shall have the resurrection body freed of sin.

And in that New Jerusalem, “my servant David shall be prince among them.” No longer the deposit of the Spirit, but the fullness. No longer hidden under bread and wine, but shining like the sun. No longer a King ruling though all too fallible under shepherds - civil and religious. But the King in Full.

This is the promise God has given us in Christ. “I am the LORD, I have spoken.” God is going to bring it all to completion.

**Moral**

So what do we do if we accept, if we have faith in that promise?

 We do what that judge says his sheep did.

We give the hungry food. Physical where needed, spiritual always. Man does not live by bread alone but by the Word of God. We keep the Word always. Sometimes it needs a sandwich and some hospitality. Those who have given even a cup of cold water will not lose their reward.

We welcome the stranger. The Spirit of God is calling all those who are his own. And that spirit has been poured out on all the world. And the sheep hear the voice. Whoever God sends, whoever hears the voice, be they known are a stranger, we welcome them. Because they are truly are brothers and sisters.

We visit the weak: the naked, the sick, those in prison. This is the mission of God, to bind the weak. It is when we are weak that we recognize the power of sin. It is when we are weak that God is strong. And the mission of the church flows to where God has said he will be.

“Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

We do what the faithful of all times and places do. We life the faith in Word and Deed. Trusting that God himself is working with us. And that He has delivered us eternally.

Is this easy? No way. But it is the call. The call of a Kingdom that will have no end. Amen