**Emmanuel Lutheran Church**

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**At Home Worship November 22, 2020**

**REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY**

**WE GATHER**

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. *(silence for reflection)*

Faithful God,

**Have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgement on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of +Jesus Christ. Let by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God’s work in the world. **Amen**.

**HYMN**: **Jesus Shall Reign**

[**https://youtu.be/yJYLXUovpjw**](https://youtu.be/yJYLXUovpjw)

[**https://blogs.elca.org/worship/files/2020/11/Jesus-Shall-Reign.pdf**](https://blogs.elca.org/worship/files/2020/11/Jesus-Shall-Reign.pdf)

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray: **O God of power and might, your Son shows us the way of service, and in him we inherit the riches of your grace. Give us the wisdom to know what is right and the strength to serve the world you have made, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**WE HEAR THE WORD**

**Old Testament Reading:** Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

11Thus says the LORD GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. 12As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. 14I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the LORD GOD. 16I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

20Therefore, thus says the LORD GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, 22I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

23I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be ruler among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Word of God, word of life.
**Thanks be to God**

**Epistle Reading:** Ephesians 1:15-23

15I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the working of God’s great power. 20God put this power to work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand of Power in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22And God has put all things under the feet of Christ and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23which is the body of Christ, the fullness of the one who fills all in all.

Word of God, word of life.
**Thanks be to God.**

**Gospel**: Matthew 25:31-46

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] 31“When the Son-of-Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the dominion prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and the devil’s angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

### **SERMON:** *Adapted from sermon by Anneke Oppewal for Hampton Uniting Church in Australia*

Before we start, I think it is important to establish first of all that we all agree that the worldview assumed by the texts we have read this morning is a valid and realistic worldview, not only for their time, but also for ours, and perhaps even for all time.

That worldview says that the world is, in general, not a good place for a very large part of the world population. That many who are in positions of power are not necessarily committed or motivated to bringing about a more just, more peaceful, more user-friendly world for everyone, everywhere, benefitting those who are now struggling. That there is a lot of suffering and injustice in the world, and those in leadership positions aren’t always the ones who are trying to change this.

The particular context in the background of the passage from Ezekiel is a situation of exile, of displacement, of mismanagement, of failed leadership, of the poor falling victim to the greed and cold-hearted narcissism of the rich. The Babylonians have come and taken the people from their homes and country to a place far away. But it isn’t just the Babylonians to blame: their own leaders ruined the country even before they were taken away, failing to rule with justice and compassion, their decisions self-serving and opportunistic.

The context and background of the gospel passage is again one of exile, displacement, destruction, ruin, mismanagement, and self-serving opportunism of the leadership, resulting in persecution and suffering for their people. When Matthew writes his gospel, the temple has just been destroyed, the Jewish nation is no more, and many of its inhabitants have fled to just about every corner of the known world.

In the gospel, the passage we read today is preceded by three other parables that are full of judgement day imagery, and is followed by the public execution of Jesus.

I believe it is important to keep all of that in mind when we look at the passages, we read this morning. The world they were written in is no happy, carefree, and lovely place. It is a world where everything has fallen apart, has been turned upside down, a world full of displaced, disoriented people, a world filled with terror and fear. A world where the Mighty have shown their muscle, and ordinary people have been left lost and without hope. It is in *that* context that Jesus says: “When the son of man comes in his glory”

And those who first read the gospel, after Jesus’ execution, after the destruction of the temple, after the collapse of their Jewish homeland, may well have wondered what that meant. This has often been interpreted from a traditional empire, king and conquerors subjugating perspective. Jesus as the King who replaces all kings; Jesus as the emperor who replaces all rulers of all empires.

But is that really what we should be reading here? Isn’t what the gospel proclaims, and what faith confesses, something radically different?

What is Jesus' throne of glory? Where does he get crowned? We, who know how the story ends, know where. It is *not* in the halls of power. The throne Jesus ends up on is a cross, and the crown he will wear is made of thorns. According to the gospel, according to every New Testament witness, the cross is where Jesus shows his glory, the thorns crowning him king.

Even in Revelations, which is relatively rich in triumphalist imagery, it is still the lamb, the suffering servant, and not some mirror image of the Roman emperor, that is depicted as ruler of the Kingdom of God. When the son of man comes in his glory, that glory will be the glory of one crucified, of one submitting to injustice, torture, and death. That will be his glory, which distinguishes him from other rulers of this world. We tend to forget that.

Too easily, when we read about glory and thrones, we skip a few centuries and imagine Jesus as some late Roman or Medieval emperor with golden robes, with a crown covered in precious stones, holding a scepter and an orb. Neither Matthew, nor any of the other New Testament writers, would have had that image in their minds. At that time, in their situation, that would have been totally impossible to even think of!

So, what happens when the son of man comes into his glory? When he takes his place on his throne? When Jesus is crucified and dies, crowned with thorns on a cross?

What happens is that the sheep get separated from the goats. A distinction is made between those who are with him, and those who are not. You may have noticed that this sentence very closely resembles a similar sentence, and similar imagery, in Ezekiel, where sheep are separated from sheep and goats from goats. One from the other. One type of person distinguished from another type of person.

So, who is with Jesus? Who are the members of his family, as our Bible version so beautifully translates? Who are the members of the Royal Family here? The hungry, the thirsty, the naked, those who have ended up in prison (and most of those would have been, in Matthew’s day, political prisoners and victims of religious or ethnic persecution). The down and outs. The suffering, the oppressed, and the displaced.

And who are the ones who are put in a place of honor? Who are the ones who get to enjoy the good life in the realm of this King? They are the people who looked after his family, who made a difference in their lives, who embraced them and sat down with them in their place of suffering.

I think it is important to realize when we read this in our time, from our perspective of relatively comfortable, still fairly dominant and domineering Christianity, that we can hardly imagine what this text would have meant to those it was originally written for.

And perhaps, to catch a glimpse of the message it carried for the first readers of the gospel, we should read it from the perspective of people in detention, of the victims of the global economic crisis that is making itself felt across the world, the people that had nothing before COVID-19 and have even less now, of people struggling in contexts where injustice is accepted as par for the course, and a few victims more or less are not counted as important. The perspective of those for whom good hospital care, hygiene, social distancing or masks aren’t even an option. The perspective of those who are dying in the streets in countries where care for the poor is nowhere near the top of the priority list. The perspective of people in war zones and famine-stricken countries. What do you think they hear when Jesus says “When the son of man comes in his glory?”

When they realize that the glory referred to is not a glory that would look very similar to that of their current oppressors, but that the glory referred to here is the glory of one suffering just like they do; suffering injustice, persecution, sickness and death, and discovering that in that is God, embracing the world, starting a new thing, pushing for new life.

That they, and those who try to make the world a different place for them, are on God’s side, on the winning side, on the side where the ultimate power lies? Not the power of gold and gemstones, not the power of political muscle and military might, of money that has the power to take for itself what others than have to go without, but the power of love, of compassion, of embracing the smallest, most insignificant of people and crowning them with glory.

When that happens, it becomes clear that when we look at all the nations assembled, there is a difference between people and people. There are those who are “family” and those who are not. And the behavior of those who are not needs to be condemned. There is injustice that can’t be tolerated if the Kingdom of the one whose glory was revealed in suffering, on a cross, crowned with thorns is to come about.

Eternal punishment? Again, I think it would be too easy if we projected that onto a world hereafter. To a medieval hell where all the bad people are gathered together after death. Eternal life, or eternal punishment, is never like that in the Bible. Eternal is never just about a far-away future. Eternal in scripture, and especially in the gospels, is a quality and not a quantity, something that extends from the past, into the present, towards the future, rather than something in some confined time and space.

Eternal punishment begins here and now. And what the Bible testifies is that a life based on injustice, of greed and self-serving narcissism, the life of those who find themselves at Jesus’ left hand, is not really worth living, not even here and now. It may look different, but in the end, the life of those who look after Jesus’ family, who feed the hungry, cure the sick, and clothe the naked, is the life that has eternal value, eternal quality, is fulfilled and fulfilling, abundant life.
This is because it lives the Kingdom here and now, because it lives by the rule of the servant King here and now, lives a reality that is better, holier and, ultimately, of more value than other ways of life…….

To return to where this sermon began: Glory for those who want to belong to the family of Jesus Christ is something completely different than what it is for some others in this world. Many see the world through the lens of the theology of Glory. We follow a theology of the Cross, where the suffering of Jesus is the lens through which we see the world. To be part of this Church, means to be committed to following in Jesus’ footsteps and looking for his type of glory. The glory of embracing the suffering of this world and taking it into ourselves, to transform it for the least of these that suffer, to bring justice and a different kind of life experience to the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the naked and the prisoners of this world. Not with a view to earn some well-deserved five-star eternal holiday at the end of it, but to live a life of eternal value in the here and now, creating a world ruled by those values here and now, aiming at overthrowing the Kings of this world with the rule of a different King. A servant King. The good life is a life that is fulfilling and fulfilled with healing and wholesome love and compassion. Amen.

**WE RESPOND**

**HYMN: All Hail The Power Of Jesus Name**

[**https://youtu.be/5WVSyGBBfi8**](https://youtu.be/5WVSyGBBfi8)

[**https://blogs.elca.org/worship/files/2020/11/All-Hail-the-Power-of-Jesus-Name.pdf**](https://blogs.elca.org/worship/files/2020/11/All-Hail-the-Power-of-Jesus-Name.pdf)

**APOSTLE’S CREED:**

We confess our shared faith with the words of the Apostle’s Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,**

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,**

**suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**

**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,**

**the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,**

**the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

On this the last Sunday of the church year, let us pray to see God’s reign in the church, in the world, and with all in need, responding to each petition with the words “In mercy, receive our prayers.”

Great God, we praise you for sustaining the church through another year of grace. Continue to shepherd your people with your tender care. Sustain the social ministries of the body of Christ, and increase ecumenical sharing of opportunities for ministry. You are the great and holy God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Sustain the world that you have made, the heights of the hills, the seas and the dry land. Guard the animals during the winter months and direct our use of creation to provide for the needs of all. Be a source of strength and refuge for all weathering severe storms. You are the great and renewing God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Bring peace to every place where conflict rages, that your reign may be honored throughout the world. Be with the people of Armenia, Ethiopia, and Hong Kong. Bless the work of the United Nations and of agencies that promote the wellbeing of all peoples. You are the great and peacemaking God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Bring a peaceful conclusion to the American national elections. Bless all the newly elected officials with a love of concord and a desire for justice. Turn us away from historic prejudices, and show us your image in each of our neighbors. You are the great and reconciling God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Visit American homes on Thanksgiving Day. When we are separated from loved ones, embrace us with your care. Keep gatherings safe. Even in our reduced celebrations, give us voices to offer thanks to you for your perpetual blessings. You are the great and generous God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

We beg you to end the earth’s pandemic. Bring healing to the millions who are suffering from the coronavirus – any who are sick, dying, despairing, isolated, unemployed, and all exhausted medical workers. Guide researchers in developing a vaccine. You are the great and healing God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Show your loving power to all who are in need. Equip us to feed the hungry, to provide clean water for the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, to visit the prisoners. We appeal to you, Sovereign God, we who are like both the sheep and the goats, and we ask that in compassion you will hear the prayers of our own hearts. We pray especially for. . . . You are the great and gracious God:
**In mercy, receive our prayers.**

Receive our prayers, O triune God: Father of glory, Lord Jesus Christ, and Spirit of wisdom, now and forever.
**Amen.**

**OFFERING:** *Part of our worship of God is giving of our talents, our passions, our gifts, our possessions, our time. Please take a moment to commit to healthy ways give back to God through service or financial gifts.*

Let us pray; **Blessed are you, O God, make of all things, You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Bless our offerings that they may be a sign of your love in the world. Amen.**

**LORD’S SUPPER**

*We not only remember, but we proclaim, we preach to each other and ourselves, Christ is present for us in, with, and under this simple bread and wine. You are invited to use any bread, juice or wine you choose and proclaim that Christ is for you!*

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: “Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

*Knowing you are in spirit with all the company of saints and Christians around the globe, share the bread and cup with these words:*

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you.

**Post-Communion Prayer**
Let us pray;

**Creator God, we give you thanks for the grain farmers, the bread bakers,**

 **the grape growers, the juice makers.**

**Redeemer God, we give you thanks for all that we remember as we have shared this meal:**

 **your birth, your life, your death and resurrection.**

**Sustaining God, we give you thanks for the eternal presence of your Spirit with us,**

 **surrounding us and filling us with Divine life.**

**May this meal we have shared renew us and inspire us**

 **to join more joyfully with you as you work for peace and justice in the world. Amen.**

~ written by Joanna Harader, and posted on the **Spacious Faith** blog. <http://spaciousfaith.com/>

**WE ARE SENT**

**Benediction**

May the God of all creation, in whose image we are made,

who claims us and calls us beloved, who strengthens us for service,

give you reason to rejoice and be glad!

The blessing of God, Sovereign, Savior and Spirit, be with you today and always.

**Amen**

**Devotional Music Links:** For your individual or group devotion, you may choose to listen to the following choral recordings made available through Augsburg Fortress: “[Hymn to Christ the Light](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NzV5S5dDaFU&feature=youtu.be);” “[God Alone Be Praised: Per Crucem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGB3y-bJ8Qc&feature=youtu.be);” “[Holy God, Holy and Glorious](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XcqZTHvBPo&feature=youtu.be).”

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*Post Communion Prayer written by Joanna Harader, and posted on the* ***Spacious Faith*** *blog.* [*http://spaciousfaith.com/*](http://spaciousfaith.com/)

 