**Notes for Next Sunday**

Last Sunday of Church Year

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

**11﻿ ”‘For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ﻿12﻿ As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ﻿13﻿ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ﻿14﻿ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ﻿15﻿ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ﻿16﻿ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.**

The scattering of the sheep “on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Ezek 34:12) would apply to the fall of Jerusalem in Ezekiel’s day (Ezek 33:21–22) and to its destruction in a.d. 70, as well as to all the persecutions inflicted on the church (cf. the scattering resulting from the persecution in Acts 8:1; 11:19). But the end times language especially points to the return of Christ, when His elect shall be gathered from all the earth (Mt 24:29–31).

*V. 11 Sovereign Lord* – The double name for God here is literally, “Adonai Yahweh” or “my Lord Yahweh, and occurs some 293 times in the OT, mostly in the prophets, and 217 are in Ezekiel. Adonai is always in the plural when used of God (just like the general title Elohim, “God”) and thus witnesses to the triune nature of the Deity. There is sense of “having supreme rank, power, authority; being above all others in character, importance, excellence.”

In a world where it is increasingly difficult to find Christian leaders in any area of life, it is comforting to know the Lord has promised to get personally involved in caring for the needs of His people when those who should be providing leadership aren’t doing their jobs.

*V. 13 Their own land* – Israel, land flowing with milk and honey, was given to them solely by God’s grace and according to His promises. Our “own land” is heaven, which God will give to us by His grace. We too are foreigners and exiles on earth, for our citizenship is in heaven (Heb 11:14-16).

*V. 15 I Myself will tend my sheep* – Sheep are not “in good hands” with a hired shepherd (Jn 10:11-13). Our Sovereign King is also our Good Shepherd. He feeds us from His hand just as a shepherd feeds his sheep.

*V. 16 the sleek and the strong.* Those with power who had fattened themselves by oppressing the other “sheep” (see vv. 17–22). **–** The Lord says“I will destroy those cruel and imperious shepherds who abuse their authority, and tyrannize over the flock.”

This verse is a good example of the biblical theme of the Great Reversal, like Luke 1:53: “He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty.”

GOSPEL – Matthew 25:31-46

**31﻿ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ﻿32﻿ All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ﻿33﻿ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ﻿34﻿ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ﻿35﻿ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ﻿36﻿ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ﻿37﻿ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ﻿38﻿ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ﻿39﻿ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ﻿40﻿ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ ﻿41﻿ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ﻿42﻿ For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ﻿43﻿ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ ﻿44﻿ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ﻿45﻿ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ﻿46﻿ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”**

The great Shepherd who separates the sheep from the goats (v. 32) once said: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” (12:30). The separation takes place before any deeds are mentioned. It is solely based whether a person has faith in Christ or not. Faith leads to deeds of mercy. A lack of faith leads to deeds of mercy left undone.

Kingdom of God parables are abundant in the chapters before our text. In chapter 24 Jesus speaks about the signs of the end of the age. In 24:36 Jesus talks about the day and hour unknown. Chapter 25 contains three end-time parables. The parable of the sheep and the goats is the last of the three. The chapter begins with the parable of the ten virgins followed by the parable of the talents. These are, of course, popular sermon texts for the Last Sunday of the Church Year.

All of this falls within the last week of Jesus’ life. It makes sense that these teachings of Jesus are quickly followed by events that lead to His cross.

*V. 32 nations will be gathered before Him*. Every single human being who ever lived or ever will live is going to be present. No excuses, No exceptions. It staggers the imagination. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake” (Daniel 12:2). Just think what it would be like to be in the Arlington National Cemetery when Jesus comes back!

*V. 33 sheep on his right and goats on his left.* In the ancient world, the right hand was regularly associated with privilege or honor. (TLSB) On the right are the Christians and on the left are those who died refusing to believe that Jesus was their Savior.