

## Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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Christ the King

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

<sup>11</sup>For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup>As 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. <sup>13</sup>I 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. <sup>14</sup>I 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. <sup>15</sup>I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup>I 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.

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

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

### Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup>"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. <sup>32</sup>All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup>and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup>Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup>for 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, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' <sup>37</sup>Then 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? <sup>38</sup>And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or

naked and gave you clothing?' <sup>39</sup>And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' <sup>40</sup>And 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.' <sup>41</sup>Then 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 his angels; <sup>42</sup>for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup>I 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.' <sup>44</sup>Then 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?' <sup>45</sup>Then 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.' <sup>46</sup>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

### **“Failure of Nerve – Welcoming Vulnerabilities”**

**We heard the story the other night at Shepherd’s Kids. It was the story of Mr. and Mrs. Moose and their Thanksgiving. Now understand that Moose is not merely their last name, they are mooses. Moose. Mooses. Moosi? Anyway, they are actual moose.**

**Mrs. Moose was planning thanksgiving and clearly understood that you are too have turkey for Thanksgiving. So, Mr. Moose sought to provide for his wife and set out to find a turkey. Along the way he encountered the goat, the squirrel, and other animals that joined him in the search for a turkey.**

**Finally they find a turkey and Mr. Moose prevails upon the turkey to be with them for Thanksgiving dinner. The turkey is less than pleased. The turkey is invited to come, but literally digs his heels in against going. In the story we see the turkey pushed along towards the Mouse house. Eventually the turkey has arrived at the Moose household.**

**Much to the turkey’s surprise—the turkey is given a seat at the dining room table. The turkey had been fearful that he would be upon the table on a platter rather than in a seat at the table. The Moose family was**

**unaware—to them having turkey on Thanksgiving meant that you made the turkey an honored guest.**

**The turkey was welcomed into the family and household. Rather than being consumed the turkey was loved, accepted, and welcomed. Rather than being served up the turkey was served with friendship and hospitality.**

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**It is the irony of the story—neither those who help and serve nor those who refuse realize the impact of their behavioral choices. The scene is the great judgment when the nations are gathered before the throne and upon that throne is Christ the King.**

**And he is performing this separating out that is described in Ezekiel. The dividing lines are based on whether or not the sick, the powerless, the naked, the imprisoned—whether or not they were helped or passed over.**

**The description is startling for the high and lofty one seated on the throne says to the righteous: “for 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, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”**

**The righteous look to the Christ in a stunned and bewildered way and say, “when was it that we every saw you in one of those conditions and helped you.” The response is clear, “as much as you did it to one of the members of my family you did it to me.”**

**Then those who did not help and respond to needs are told the same---“as much as you did not do it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did not do it to me.”**

**Of course, they would never reject Jesus. They would never reject the Christ. They would never turn away from helping him. His point was clear—if they turned away from anyone in need they were turning their backs on him.**

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**This story—when one steps back from it—continues to speak to us. It really is a story about choices. It really is a story about us.**

**The story offers two options. There really are only two options here. To welcome or not to welcome. And that is about it. To welcome or not to welcome. Either we will welcome into our lives the sick, and the hurting, the naked, and the needy or we will not welcome them. There is no in-between, there is no part way, there is no option. It is one or the other. Welcome or not welcome.**

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**While I do think that there are selfish individuals in the world—and we have all encountered them. I do not think that is where we are. We want to do what is right. We want to help; we want to make a better world. This is a church who understands itself and its purpose very clearly. “Changing lives and growing in God’s love.” It says it all. We want to do what we can in order to expand the meaning and hope in people. We want to help. We want to make a difference.**

**Is there any of us that do not want that? I hardly think so. We are passionately committed to giving ourselves to the betterment of others. And yet we do hold back. We tend to give out of our leftovers. We tend to give a little bit here and a little bit there. And we tend to not extend ourselves as much as we could.**

**Let me frame it in terms of the two choices—it is not that we always choose to welcome or that we always choose to not welcome. We are welcoming, but how welcoming are we. It is the degree to which we welcome that comes into play.**

**We, as Christians in this society and culture, tend to suffer from a failure of nerve. A failure of nerve is what I call it when our response action is to protect the self first—when we shore up all of our own needs first and then we give or serve or help from what is left.**

**A failure of nerve. It is the plague that not only prevents us from being more welcoming and hospitable to others but prevents us even from being more welcoming and hospitable to ourselves. We tend to not think of ourselves as good enough, or smart enough, or young enough, or rich enough, or deserving enough, or, or, or....fill in the blank we don't cut it. Ah, a failure of nerve.**

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**Such is not the God who calls us into existence. Such is not the Christ who is the King who reigns from on high. For the God we know is the very one who took on flesh as our flesh. The God we know is the very one who when confronted with the choice—and it was a choice of giving himself over or not—when confronted with that choice he stepped up.**

**He did not shrink away. There was no failure of nerve. He went the full measure of the cross and gave it all for us. And it did not come back empty for God raised him up to rule and reign forever and ever.**

**See here, that becomes the pattern of the God who calls us into existence. That when we present ourselves fully—when we give it over and when we give it away—oh we come back full not empty. Love grows when it is given away—there is not less—there is always more.**

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**To welcome or not to welcome—that is the question. That is the reality. For so many in our world they will heed the messages of the culture which says, “take care of yourself.” That culture is saying, hey, wait the economy is bad now, “you better see to your own needs.” “Let the government figure it out.”**

**No. That will not work. People are going to be hungry. And we had better give them a chair at our table.**

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**It goes back to the wonderful little story about the Moose family. They welcomed the turkey into their lives. They could have consumed that turkey—and I dare say the turkey assumed that was what was going to happen.**

**Isn't that a picture of how we are—we find it easier to consume the world. We find it easier to claim it and use it up rather than welcome it and give.**

**I'm not talking about turkeys anymore---I'm talking about faith. Let us let our faith rule our lives rather than our fears. Did you hear that? Let us allow our faith to rule our lives rather than our fears—so that we can be welcoming enough to let others in. It takes some vulnerability to welcome another into our lives. We have to risk—sure we have to risk some things we own—but its often more about risking our behaviors.**

**Jesus, the King beyond all kings, the very one resurrected from the dead---oh that Jesus paints us a picture of a world that we are to live into and bring about. It is a world where the hungry are fed, where the lonely are welcomed, where the lost are brought home, and where the thirst are filled.**

**This table—the Lord’s table—is a signpost of the world that is to come. Here thirst and hunger and separation are eliminated. Here is a place of welcome where broken bread and poured out cup come calling together a communion of the very presence of the living God.**

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**Realized eschatology is the theological term for what is happening here. Yes there is a future orientation here. That one day we will all be together in the fullness of the kingdom. But, let us also not fail to realize that the eschaton, the kingdom is now. It is realized right now. That fullness is now, and we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, make it reality as we gather from east and west from north and south those who otherwise would be not noticed or lost or ignored. “As much as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.”**

**Now is the kingdom. Now is the day. We have been welcomed here—in the sacrifice of Christ—in the company of this table—we have been welcomed here. Do not allow a failure of nerve to stop that powerful movement of God.**

**There are really two choices. To welcome or not to welcome.**

**God in Christ has welcomed you. Now, don’t hold back... don’t hold back—welcome, welcome, welcome...**

**Be a moose about it---welcome, welcome, welcome... Amen.**