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The older I grow the more grateful I am that the Judge of all life, our theme for this week, is also its Shepherd. My wife, Alyce, and I are members of Salem Covenant Church in New Brighton, where we worship with joy and serve together, she with her music and kitchen skills and I as part-time pastor of visitation. Since retirement from Covenant Publications in 1994, we have served five interim pastorates in Illinois and Minnesota, compiled and edited *Glad Hearts*, an anthology of Covenant readings from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, and more recently launched a new website at [rootedwings.com](http://rootedwings.com).

Sunday, November 23 (Christ the King)  
Zephaniah 3:7-13  
'I Will Awake a Witness'

Scripture is replete with its witness to the sovereignty of God. And it makes clear throughout that his sovereignty cannot ultimately be thwarted. Though he waits in the wings of all life with patience and hope, there have come times and there will come a final time when "I will arise as a witness," and "in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed."

Yet as the prophet makes clear, God's severity is only the other side of his grace. Our ultimate Judge, true to his nature, is also our Shepherd. His intention in judgment is only to remove from within and around us the pride and haughtiness that hold us in captivity to ourselves so that he may "leave ... a people humble and lowly."

To run from God's sovereignty, therefore--not to mention deny it--is only to shut ourselves off temporarily from his glory and grace.

*Lord place us in the light of your countenance, that experiencing you as you are we may come to our true selves and be renewed in your Spirit. Amen.*

Monday, November 24  
Zechariah 3:14-20

## 'I Will Bring You Home'

Zion, Israel, and Jerusalem, here named by the prophet speaking for God, are not simply place names, ancient and modern. They are symbols of home for every true believer, carriers of all the sacred memories that flow from God's work in history into and through the fabric of our lives.

"Where is home for you?" I once asked an enthusiastic young Christian interviewing for a position as a youth worker. I had no doubt that he was a believer. Nor was I unaware of his talents, which were considerable. Yet in our sharing, though he was all over the map with programs and ideas, it was clear to me that he had not yet come to himself. "That's a profound question," the young man said. "I'm not sure I know!"

Where is your home, really? Have you allowed the Lord to bring you there? Will you allow him again today?

*Lord, gather us in to the only home we have in common. Grant us a more settled sense of who we are so that you may use us to help others find their way. Amen.*

Tuesday, November 25

Ezekiel 34:11-16

## 'I Will Seek the Lost'

In his wonderful paraphrase of Romans 12, Eugene Peterson says that "embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God." The reason is, as he puts it, that "the only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him."

God is forever acting in history on behalf of his people. And his heart, as he has Ezekiel proclaim, is a shepherd heart. "I will seek out ... rescue ... feed ... seek the lost ... bring back the strayed ... bind up the injured ... strengthen the weak." But with such blessing comes also a warning, we need also to hear: "the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice."

Christ the King is Christ the Good Shepherd. But Christ the Good Shepherd is also the King. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

*Thank you, Lord, that you are at work today, both to bless the needy and to warn the self-centered and self-satisfied. Amen.*

Wednesday, November 26

Psalm 95:1-7

Sing and Bow Down

Who among us is without reason for praising God? “If you cannot sing like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus, and say he died for all.” That is the balm of Gilead that makes the wounded whole and heals the sin-sick soul. “O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth.”

But bow down too, in both body and soul, for the one to whom you sing is holy. “He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand.”

My mother used to tell me that the key to good singing is to serve the message. That was not to put down good technique. It was only to encourage me to think beyond all that, including myself, to the message I was delivering and the people to whom it was being delivered. “Sing to witness,” she said, “and bow to the message.”

*Lord, help us to declare your glory and honor your majesty. Amen.*

Thursday, November 27 (Thanksgiving Day)

Matthew 25:31-46

‘Dies Irae’

Our title today is from the Latin Mass for the dead in the Western Church. It means “Day of Wrath,” a solemn reminder of Judgment Day in Jesus’ parable for today. In earlier times this last week of the Church Year began with Judgment Sunday. I have often wondered if the fact that we call it Christ the King Sunday instead is because that seems more positive and less worrisome to us.

In any case, the message remains the same, whatever title we give it. There will be a Day of Judgment, and the judgment God meets out will be based not only on our confession of faith (or lack of such) but on the evidence of that faith in our lives (or lack of it). While we need not fear that day if we trust in God’s grace, we must surely stand in awe of it nonetheless, and heed Jesus’ warnings concerning faith void of obedience.

How will it be for you on that Day? And how for me?

*Lord Jesus, hone our lives now to evidence our faith and so be prepared for your coming in glory. Amen.*

Friday, November 28

Ephesians 1:15-23

Hope, Riches, and Power

How long has it been since you felt overwhelmed by the realities of your faith in our Triune God?

Beginning with Paul's apostolic desire for each of us to have "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" so that "the eyes of your heart are enlightened,:" he launches into a prayer that you may know "the hope to which he has called you ... the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints ... [and] the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe...."

Be reminded today that your faith was never meant to be defensive. It is meant rather to open vistas before you, full of potential for growth and life and engagement that God is ever waiting to supply. We must learn to live into all that if we are truly to bear fruit for him.

*Lord, awaken me to all you are waiting even now in the wings of my life to supply. Amen.*

Saturday, November 29

Psalms 100

'Make a Joyful Noise'

There is a wonderful symmetry in the rhythms of the Church Year. It ends now with time to reflect on where we stand in relation to all God has done for us, and where he might stand in reference to us on the Last Day.

And as it ends, no matter how soberly, it enjoins us to "make a joyful noise" and "enter his courts with praise." The reasons for that lie clearly beyond us. We do so because "the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

We also do so because we know that tomorrow the cycle begins all over again with the First Sunday in Advent, and the story-telling that will continue

again through Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost—not to mention all the sacred implications of that story to be laid out in the season of Trinity.

No wonder we sing! Life goes on, not forever on this earth, yet always with him at our side until that day he brings us truly home.

*The Lord bless you and keep you until that day! Amen.*