Sermon and Readings Christ the King 22nd November 2026

Ezekiel 34.11–16, 34.20–24

11 For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek
them out. **12** 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. **13** 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. **14** 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. **15** I myself will be the
shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. **16** 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. **20** Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will
judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. **21** Because you pushed with
flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you
scattered them far and wide, **22** I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be
ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. **23** I will set up over them
one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and
be their shepherd. **24** And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David
shall be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.

Psalm 100

1 O shout to the Lord in triumph, all the earth:
serve the Lord with gladness and come before his face with songs of joy.
2 Know that the Lord he is God:
it is he who has made us and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
3 Come into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise:
give thanks to him and bless his holy name.
4 For the Lord is good, his loving mercy is for ever:
his faithfulness throughout all generations.

Ephesians 1.15–23

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the
saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember
you in my prayers. 17 I 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
him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is
the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious
inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his
power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20 God
put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated
him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far 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. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and
has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the
fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25.31–46

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. 32 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, 33 and 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 kingdom prepared for you from the
foundation of the world; 35 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, 36 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." 37 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? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and
welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw
you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40 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." 41 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; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave
me nothing to drink, 43 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.” **44** 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?” **45** 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.” **46** And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Sermon

There’s an old line that Australia “rode on the sheep’s back.” For generations, wool paid for our roads, towns and universities. Many of us have a grandfather, an uncle or a mate who has stood in a paddock at dawn, counting the flock and noticing the one that wasn’t there.

So, when Ezekiel starts talking about sheep, a lot of us don’t need it explained. Anyone who has run stock knows what Ezekiel is describing. You walk the fence line after a storm. You count. You find the one caught in the wire, or the one that wandered into the creek bed, or the one that has gone down and can’t get up. A good farmer doesn’t shrug and say, “Well, we’ve still got most of them.”

Today is the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday before Advent, the end of the church’s year. We are asked to look at the one we say is in charge of all things, and the readings give us a surprising picture. This king is a shepherd, and he is out in the paddock looking for the one that’s missing.

Some of us might recoil at the word “king” in a country that argues about crowns every few years. Whatever you think of that debate, the Bible’s idea of a king is nothing like a ceremony or a photograph on a coin. It is closer to a job description: the one responsible for the flock.

Ezekiel is writing to exiles, people who have lost their home, land and their temple. They are scattered, and the prophet says the leaders are largely to blame. The shepherds fed themselves and not the sheep. The strong pushed the weak aside with shoulder and flank, muddied the water so no one else could drink, and left the injured to fend for themselves.

Australians know this pattern, and we have a name for the opposite of it: the fair go. It is one of the things we like most about ourselves. We say that nobody should be stuck at the bottom with no chance, that the system shouldn’t be

rigged, that you don't kick someone when they're down. We even have a word for what we do to people who get too far ahead of the pack: the tall poppy gets cut down.

But Ezekiel asks something harder than whether we are fair. He asks whether we are looking. Fairness can be a very comfortable, hands-off virtue. We can believe in a fair go in the abstract and never notice that someone in our street, church or family has not had one. God's complaint against the shepherds is not that they were unjust in the abstract. It is that "you have not sought the lost."

And then God says something staggering. I myself will search for my sheep. Listen to the verbs: I will seek them out. I will rescue them. I will bring them out. I will feed them. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. God is the subject of almost every one of them. Having watched the shepherds fail, God does not hand the job to someone else. He takes it on himself.

That is good news for anyone who has felt lost. You do not have to find your own way back to God. You do not have to tidy yourself up first or work out the right words. The shepherd comes after you.

Then Paul, in Ephesians, lifts our eyes from the paddock to the whole universe. He prays that we would know "the hope to which he has called you" and the endless greatness of God's power, the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him above every rule, authority, power and dominion, and above every name that is named.

We are a people who know something about influences bigger than ourselves. We live on a continent of drought, flood, bushfire and cyclone. Many of us have watched a river rise or the sky turn orange. We know what it is to stand in front of something we cannot control. Many of us carry other pressures too: rent that keeps climbing, a mortgage that feels impossible, the cost of the weekly shop, work that is uncertain, a world that seems to stumble from one crisis to the next.

Our cultural answer to all this is a famous one: she'll be right. It is a bit of a shrug, a bit of stoicism, sometimes a bit of denial. And there's something commendable in it, the refusal to panic or to whinge. But it has no ground under

it. Sometimes she won't be right. Sometimes the bank balance, the diagnosis or the fire front tells us so.

Paul offers something firmer. This hope doesn't rest on our optimism or our resilience. It rests on an event: God raised Jesus, and the one who was raised now holds all authority. Notice that Paul says Christ is head over all things for the church. The greatest power in the universe is committed to the flock. Whatever feels too big, too loud or too final, it's under his feet, not over his head.

That does not mean we won't face floods, fires or hard seasons. It means that none of them has the last word. The hope Paul prays for is the deep, steady confidence that the one who holds everything is the one who went looking for us.

And now Matthew, the great judgement scene. The Son of Man comes in glory, with all the nations gathered before him. We might expect the questions of the day to be about doctrine, achievement or reputation. Instead, the king asks about the most ordinary things: I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you visited me.

Look at who is on that list: the hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the one without adequate clothing, the sick and the prisoner. They are the people we are least interested in. And notice that both groups, the sheep and the goats, are surprised. "Lord, when did we see you?" Nobody in the story knew it was him.

So where might he be, here, now, in this country?

He might be in the queue at Tony's kitchen or The Base, where the people waiting include workers with jobs, parents skipping meals so the kids can eat, and pensioners who did everything right. He might be in the rental application line with fifty other families competing for one house. He might be in the aged care home where the visitors have thinned out to almost none. He might be in the hospital bed in a country town three hours from the nearest specialist. He might be among the people seeking safety who arrived by boat or by plane and have waited years for an answer about their lives. He might be inside a prison,

and we should be honest that First Nations people are represented there far out of proportion to their place in the population, and that this is a wound in our national story that has not healed. He might be the old bloke who hasn't spoken to anyone since Tuesday, or the young person who has stopped answering messages, or the farmer at the end of the drought who is not okay and won't say so.

"Truly I tell you," says the king, "just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me." We have a proud tradition of mateship, of not leaving anyone behind. We tell stories of it: the diggers who carried each other off the field, the Papuan carriers on the Kokoda Track who brought wounded Australian soldiers down the mountains, and the neighbours who turn up with a chainsaw and a casserole after a flood or a fire. These are good and true stories. But Jesus takes the idea further. Mateship says, I'll look after you because you're one of us. Christ the King says, I am found in the ones who aren't. The measure is not who is on our team. It is who is at the edge of our sight.

What does this ask of us?

First, it asks us to notice. The people on the left hand in Matthew's story are not monsters. They are not cruel. They simply did not see. Their failure is a failure of attention, the kind that comes from being busy, comfortable, tired or glued to a screen. The question is not only "What did I do wrong this week?" but "Who did I walk past?"

Second, it asks us to take a turn as shepherd. Every one of us has some flock, whether a family, a workplace, a club, or a group chat. Ezekiel asks whether we feed ourselves from it or feed it. Do we push with shoulder and flank, or do we notice who has drifted to the edge and go after them? Often a single phone call, "I haven't seen you lately, how are you really?", is shepherding in its basic form.

Third, it asks us to take heart. Matthew's story is not told to crush us. It tells us that small, unseen things matter to the king: a meal, a visit, a lift, a seat at the table, a quiet word. Most of what we do for others will never be recorded, thanked or noticed. But the one who counts the sheep counts that too and receives it as done to him.

Psalm 100 shows how we are meant to live under this king: “Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.” This is not the gladness of people anxiously ticking boxes. It is the gladness of sheep who know whose paddock they are in. “Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

So, we come in through his gates with thanksgiving this morning, and then we go back out through them, into streets, workplaces, supermarkets and the phone calls of the week ahead, looking for him in the hungry, lonely, the stranger and the overlooked. He has told us where he will be. And all the while, the king who is head over all things goes on ahead of us, as he always has, looking for the one that is lost. Amen.