

Bible Study for Wednesday 18th November 2020

Preparation

In our Bible Study this week we will be reading the following lectionary readings set for Sunday (22nd November):

- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
- Psalm 100
- Ephesians 1:15-23
- Matthew 25:31-46

When exploring this week's readings try following this pattern:

Pray a simple prayer first or remind yourself of the words of Psalm 100:4, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name."

Read one of the readings

Pause

Reflect on the reading

Ask yourself

- Does anything strike me in this reading?
- Does anything challenge me in this reading?
- How does this reading speak to me of God's nature?

Try re-reading the passage and see if anything is reinforced or something else comes out of it for you.

After your reflection, you may wish to move on to another reading, but you don't have to look at them all.

When you have finished your reflections for the day, pray the final prayer:

Final Prayer:

Good shepherd of the sheep, you offer us a way to live life in all its fullness, be with us in the coming week, show us the ways of your heart and bring us closer to you. **Amen.**

If you want to read a short reflection please see next page.

Reflection

I love Ezekiel's understanding of God's justice and mercy. Ezekiel speaks elsewhere of God's rejection of the political leadership (the "shepherds of Israel"). Here God is opposing those who are fat and well fed at the expense of their neighbours who are in poverty, wounded and hungry. Whilst the poor and the harassed, still around in Jesus' time (Matthew 9:36), continue to struggle, the fat sheep do not share their plenty.

In Ezekiel, shepherds and fat sheep are getting it wrong: we should not get fat whilst others starve. God says, "I will step in and provide a different reality for you – one in which, if you are in need, you will be loved back into wholeness. Through my servant David, you will be fed, clothed and comforted. This leads me into a better understanding of God's nature and points to the identity of Christ.

The psalmist is also focussed on God's nature this week. In many ways the psalm sums up how the whole Hebrew Scriptures understand God's nature. Verse 3 "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" and verse 5 "For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations." I could do worse than memorise these lines when I want a quick reminder of God's nature. Note that the psalmist also demonstrates what human beings need to do when encountering God's nature. As we focus on God's nature, we become aware we are in God's presence, then, recognising God's holiness, we can only praise God.

The Ephesians reading, is a kind of summary of God's nature in Christ, and also the nature of the Church, Christ's body. Paul leads us to see our relationship with one another through Christ our head.

The gospel reading acts as a brake on anyone who assumes that they are entering God's gates (as in Psalm 100) without their heart being in tune with God's nature.

These readings remind me how Christ has fulfilled the prophesy of Ezekiel and continues to do so through our lives and our compassionate acts. In Matthew, at the end of time, the Ezekiel prophesy comes true through the ones who have acted in favour of the poor, oppressed and marginalised. These ones cared for Christ even if they did not know his name. We are invited to encounter God's nature in these readings and we are reminded that our acts reveal the nature of our hearts.