

Squamish United Church
Rev. Karen Millard
Reign of Christ Sunday

November 22, 2020

Scriptures

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 22-24;
Matthew 25:31-46

King of Comfort

Whenever a new monarch or leader comes to power people ask in their wisdom and anticipation, their hopes and their fears. *What kind of leader will this person truly be?* We are doing the same with the politics in North America today. Political leaders have been voted out and new ones voted in and still we hope and pray that the new leadership will bring the change we dream of. Most will probably call me naive because I dream of a leader more like the one we celebrate today. (I guess that is why people get called Fools for Christ).

Today is the day in the church year when we celebrate the reign of Christ. King Jesus. I have never really connected with the terms King Jesus or Reign of Christ because Jesus in a lot of ways is the polar opposite of leaders our world is used to. Today's Scriptures use the image of a shepherd king or many would call Jesus a servant King.

Jesus, carries a shepherd's crook instead of donning a crown until one of thorns in place on him in mockery. His followers called him a King but he was a king of peace, of hope, of justice for all. A king for the lost and lonely.

Jesus represents the flesh and blood, human breathing God that Ezekiel speaks of in the Hebrew Bible. The God who searches for the lost sheep. God seeks because the sheep have been scattered "on a day of clouds and thick darkness." See, sheep, at the best of times, have very poor eyesight. On a foggy day, they have little chance of finding their way without some guidance. Honestly, I don't think we so different from these sheep at least I'm not. Not metaphorically speaking but literally, we even as faithful and not so faithful Christians have a tendency to be very shortsighted when it comes to staying on the path we should follow. When it comes to following the Jesus way, when it comes to loving our neighbours and even our enemies.

Sometimes, even with our good intentions, the storms of life scatter us. The good news is that Jesus still seeks us out, wherever we may have wandered, to bring us back to the meadow where we can be safe under Jesus' watch. Not an oppressive watch but a comforting peaceful presence. As the shepherd finds the sheep, he guides them to green meadows where food and water are plentiful. The shepherd provides for them all that they need. Pause there for a moment. Do you hear that? The shepherd leads us, God leads us, the holy leads us to the green pastures where everything is plentiful and invites us to rest. What if we believe that? What if we trusted in that way. Can you close your eyes for a moment and see that. Resting in green pastures in comfort and surrounded by peace.

Some of you I know have been working so hard to keep everything a float before 2020 and especially now. I want to remind you that we are being held and cared for imagine yourself with

permission to lie down in the green pastures and rest. Just stop and rest for a bit, soak in the nourishing presence of the holy.

If you find yourself scoffing... arguing there is no time for rest... know that I hear you and I want you to stop again. Right now in this moment and breathe deeply. Close your eyes and summon peace.

Ezekiel 34:15-16, says “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. 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.”

A shepherd does so much more than simply let the sheep out to pasture. The shepherd makes sure that they have plenty of rest and goes after the lost sheep, collecting those who have strayed. The shepherd heals those who are hurting and builds up those who are frail. What a radical difference from the leaders we have been watching over the last years politically. It makes me realize why God also often carries the titles of father or mother because like a shepherd our father God longs for us to be safe, our mother God lives to shelter us in loving embrace. Those of us who are parents might better understand the shepherd who puts more energy into seeking the lost than the rest of the herd. We know that when one of our children is really struggling they are the one that get our attention, our focus, our energy even if it means the ones that are doing well get disgruntled and jealous. Even as the world of privilege raises their voice and says we are more important this loving God, Jesus says I see you, and if you need to be with me come help me care for this one who needs our love.

In Matthews gospel the sheep that are loyal followers of the king, have followed the king's lead without even realizing that is what they were doing. Their love for the one who cares for them has led them to imitation. I love these questions and the holy response. They ask, “Lord, when did we feed you or give you something to drink? When did we ever visit you in the hospital or in jail? When did we provide a home or clothes for you?” The king answers, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Just as Jesus spent his time on earth with those society looked down upon, with those who most needed him, Jesus expects his sheep to do the same. Jesus calls us to do the same as his disciples, followers of the Jesus way. It's like this shepherd Jesus is not content for his sheep to simply be like other sheep. Jesus sees their potential, and so as he cares and nurtures them, he leads them to a truer fuller life, a deeper understanding of who they are and to whom they belong. As we discover our potential, our call to live as joint heirs of God in the family of all people we by loving one another actually inherit, become one in the kingdom of God.

So on this day where we celebrate the life of Jesus and all that we have learned and embraced throughout the year before we turn our mind back to the beginning we stop and see who Jesus was and is and is to come. We recognize the one who will seek us out where we are, a king who provides for our every need, a king who corrects us and guides us along the path as we follow. Jesus seeks us, feeds us, and leads us so that we can prosper. It is up to us to decide what kind of sheep—what kind of citizens of God's kingdom—we will be.

And so as we end this season and enter a new one let us take a moment to pray a prayer for times of change. A moment to reflect on where we have come from, where we are and where we feel God is leading us. Let us pray.