

Kirk of St James
Sunday November 26, 2017
Sermon "There is Something in the Air"
Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton

There is always a subtle shift in the air from mid-November on. At first is not that noticeable, perhaps just a little anxiety and a few more people in town. By the last week of November it really starts to set in as we square up with our to-do lists and realize that we have far more left to do than we thought. I had one of those moments this past week. I had not been able to Skype with my brother and his family in a number of weeks so was looking forward to catching up with them. The first thing my niece said when she came on was "Aunt Manda, why are your Halloween decorations still up? I like Halloween but it's over." There is nothing quite like being shamed by your pint sized family members, especially when they disagree with your life decisions. Although I will say I ended the call that night and took my decorations down! It was good motivation. There is always some anxiety over what is to be done this time of year. I am sure you are likely feeling a lot of similar emotions as you think about Christmas baking, shopping, parties, what has to be in the mail by what date to ensure it arrives in time. Not to mention the extra calls to charity and service, lists that need to be accomplished, and additional special events. The fact that Christ the King Sunday falls in the middle of this hectic chaos is actually quite appropriate.

While many of us view New Year's or perhaps even the start of September as the beginning of a new year, the church Calendar actually closes out the year with Christ the King Sunday and begins anew with advent. This Sunday has an eschatological dimension that looks at the end of time when the kingdom will be fulfilled according to God's plan, and it also looks ahead to the promise of the new born king and all the ways he will change our lives. When this

feast was first begun in 1925 it was in response to what many viewed as a rising sense of secularism in the world, especially after the horrors of the First World War. This day was meant to remind people that Christ is present in the world, and that His love and mercy are at work in our lives. Here at the end of November Christ the King Sunday is a good reminder to focus on the parts of the Christmas season that mean the most. It encourages us to worry less about the to-do lists and focus more on the birth of Christ which, I recognize is easy to say and infinitely harder to do.

When we come to our readings this morning it comes as no surprise that the passages chosen focus on who Christ the King is, or, as Ezekiel calls him--the shepherd. Ezekiel had a difficult audience to reach when he brings his message to the Israelite people. He must demonstrate for his post-exilic audience that God was not powerless, that the destruction of the temple was not the end and there was still hope. This is a message that has not lost its urgency throughout the centuries. Throughout history there have been countless events that have challenged our faith and, sometimes even our confidence in the omnipotence of God. After WWI many found themselves wondering how life could ever be the same again. This message is a continual call back to our roots, our foundation, to remind us of what is important. This is a message that resonates in countless times and places, even among the harried Christmas crowd of today. Among the chaos of what Christmas can sometimes become we strive to not lose sight of the most important part. We know that we are able to live in hope and not fear because Immanuel God with us was born in Bethlehem.

Ezekiel promises that the Shepherd will search for his sheep and seek them out. "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..." the Shepherd promises. No one is forgotten, not the exiled Israelites,

not us today, the Shepherd is aware of his flock no matter how far it is scattered. However, there is another aspect of the Shepherd that we must not forget and it is found at the end of the promise when he said "the fat and the strong I will destroy." This is a shift from the pastoral to the prophetic and is subtle yet also vivid. As one biblical scholar wrote "We find no litany of curses, no ranting...God seems resolute but weary--and almost grieved at once again having to set people on the path to justice. Like a parent intent on teaching her child, who remembers that calm consistency is key, God does not fly off the handle. God just quietly and firmly corrects. Again. And Again...God is active and involved here, both with the poor, thin sheep and with the fat, disobedient ones." As the prophets have been reminding us over the past few weeks when we lose sight of Christ we soon lose sight of what God calls us to do and be. For years now the Israelites have been feeling like the lost, thin, and injured sheep, and Ezekiel is promising them that they have not been forgotten.

This would have been welcome news for the Israelites who were wondering how long they will have to suffer in enemy hands. Driven from their lands, their temple a pile of rubble, they must have wondered where God was or, if in fact he even existed. Perhaps God was not who they thought. God reminds them in this passage that he is all powerful even in the midst of difficult situations and that He has not left them. At the end of WWI while societies recovered Pope Pius wanted to remind the world that even in the face of great horror God is still in charge. The same is true for us today. I know that when we hear of events like the recent attacks in Egypt, the mass shooting at the harvest music festival in the United States, or the ongoing worldwide refugee crises we wonder where God is, or, if he is powerless because if he could change things then surely he would. Christ the King Sunday reminds us that God is God through the good and the bad. He will look after the poor, the weak, the injured, and he will

correct the fat and strong. The Shepherd has come into the world, and he will not forget anyone.

I know this has been a year filled with tragedy around the world. We often turn on the news with a sense of dread because it feels like anything could have happened in the span of a night. I know there have been moments where we have cried out for justice and we have not felt like we received it but, be encouraged. Christ is King and he is not powerless. The shepherd has not forgotten a single sheep. Today we remember that we pray and live in hope. A new Christmas album by a band called Casting Crowns just came out and on it they have a song called *Somewhere in Your Silent Night*. The first verse says

All is calm and all is bright
 Everywhere but in your heart tonight
 They're singing carols of joy and peace
 But you feel too far gone and too far out of reach

Somewhere in your silent night
 Heaven hears the song your broken heart has cried
 Hope is here, just lift your head
 For love has come to find you
 Somewhere in your silent night

Love has come to find you. Are there better words to begin the advent season with? I know that our Christmas season will be busy. I know we all have to do-lists that we will need to make our way through. My prayer is that we each find a few minutes a day to celebrate the true reason for the season. To find quiet moments that remind us that Christ is both the King who looks after his flock and also a baby who brought hope into the world. May we each find moments that speak to our hearts, feed our souls, and replace our weariness with joy.