The Last Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 29A)
The Feast of Christ the King

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24 Ps. 95.1-7a Ephesians 1.15-23 Matthew 25.31-46

The Last Sunday after Pentecost is observed as the Feast of Christ the King. This observance is of recent origin, being first promulgated in the Roman Catholic Church by Pius XI, in 1925. The feast entered Anglican usage quite recently (1970 in England, beginning about 1979 in the U.S.), and caps the Church year with a recognition of the universal kingship of Jesus.

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24

1. Immediately preceding these verses Ezekiel denounces the bad shepherds of Israel; that the kings have not ruled the people justly, and have not served the LORD.
    a. The theme of God as shepherd is found throughout the Bible: Ps. 23; Isa. 40.11; Jer. 31.10; John 10.1-18.
        i. This theme follows common practice in the ancient Near East (from the time of third millennium B.C. Sumerian kings) of kings referring to themselves as shepherds of their people.

2. God's role as shepherd is described in three ways:
    a. First as the One who reverses the evil done by bad human shepherds.
    b. Second as the defender of justice and upholder of the weak.
    c. Third (not in this lesson) in a covenant of prosperity between the LORD and His people.

3. Roles associated with human kings will be maintained by God.
    a. He will separate the good from the bad.

4. David will be established as a just king.
    a. David will not be brought back from the dead, but a king from his dynasty will be chosen in fulfillment of the divine promise (2 Sam. 7).

Psalm 95.17a

1. From the first centuries of the Church, Psalm 95, either in full or in part, has been used liturgically as an introduction to divine service. In abbreviated form, the psalm is the *Venite, exultemus* of Morning Prayer. (The full psalm is used in Lent.)

2. While the psalm is often thought of as having two contrasting halves, it is an integrated whole if it is read as instructive, as a *sermon* on our right relationship with God.
    a. The "halves" may be considered to be a hymn celebrating God's kingship and a prophetic oracle.
        i. Indeed, the prophetic oracle which begins at v. 8 may be considered to be the LORD Himself speaking.

3. The language in the psalm is liturgical, and may reflect an actual recitation used on entering the Temple. (In Hebrew, the words in v. 6, "Come, let us bow down ..." are stated as imperative, and reflect an actual posture of submission.)

4. If the psalm is seen as a call to prayer followed by instruction, it may be seen as a reminder of our right relationship with God.
    a. The two halves of the psalm can be viewed, therefore, as a conditional oath, and "if/but" statement of the fealty that God demands.

Ephesians 1.15-23

1. This lesson comprises a thanksgiving and prayer of intercession.
    a. The thanksgiving is closely parallel to that found at Phlm. 4-5 (*cf.* Col. 1.3-4; 9-10), with the rest of the prayer drawing freely on language found in Colossians.
        i. Most modern scholars argue, on the basis of such linguistic clues, that Ephesians was written not by Paul but by a follower. (The same evidence can support the conclusion that one hand is involved in both letters!)

2. In v. 1 Paul refers to the "saints" (*hagioi*). This term (which literally means "holy ones") is used by him throughout the letter to refer both to the earthly congregation of believers and to angels.

3. God's might is revealed in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and His exaltation over all ranks of angels.
    a. Paul is using early Christian creedal statements that echo themes found in Ps. 110.1 and 8.7 to emphasize to his readers the glorious position to which they have been called in Christ.

4. In v. 23 the reference to "him who fills all in all" contains a Greek participle that can be read in the "middle" as opposed to passive voice.
    a. A middle reading is more consonant with Pauline theology: Jesus is head over all things for the Church (the body) that "he *might fill*" all in all with His fullness.
        i. Paul emphasizes the Jesus will empower growth in the Church but that this first requires our response to Him.

Matthew 25.31-36

1. The image of the shepherd, and of the king separating the good from the bad, recurs.
    a. The king functions, therefore, as a judge, continuing Jesus' emphasis on judgment.

2. Jesus' final illustration in His eschatological discourse in not a parable (except insofar as the illustration of sheep and goats appears at vv. 32-33). The illustration serves as the final high point of Jesus' public ministry.

3. This passage has no parallel in the other Synoptic Gospels. It is unique to Matthew and reflects, probably, Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law.
    a. The passage is quite "Jewish," incorporating important O.T. themes.
        i. Regardless, the passage reflects Jesus' teaching that preparation for entry into the kingdom involves practical preparation: doing actual works of charity.
            1. The works of charity used in the illustration are six of the seven "corporal works of mercy" as taught by the Church.
                a. The seventh is burial of the dead (*but see* 8.22).
            2. The corporal works of mercy are reflected in our Baptismal Covenant promises "to seek and serve Christ in all persons".
                a. Service to others ("the least of these who are members of my family") is service to Jesus.

4. Jesus refers to "all the nations" being gathered. At His coming, He will summon and judge believers and nonbelievers alike; both Jew and Gentile, and those of all faiths or no faith.
    a. As phrased in the Creed, He will "judge the living and the dead".