

Today on this feast we meet in the prophecy of Ezekiel, the supreme confidence of Christ the King – against whom, in the end *nothing can stand.* The God in whom we have a sure foundation, because his *is* – as we say every day – the kingdom, the power and the glory. I will, he says. Not *I might*, not *I will try to*. ***I will***. 21 times in 11 verses of Ezekiel.

I will.

I will search,

I will rescue,

I will bring them out,

I will feed,

and **I will** be their shepherd,

and **I will** give rest,

healing,

strength,

restoration.

I will destroy the oppressor,

I will save,

I will judge

and **I will** set up a Shepherd.

I will be their God.

The ***I will*** of Divine, Kingly Love.

All through the Jewish scriptures a good King was always described as a shepherd to his people. Right back to David, the original Shepherd-King. And, as we know, shepherds in those days lived, walked, breathed with their flock, cared for them, protected them, fed, nurtured, and healed them. The Shepherd king image of the people of Israel was always about true kingly authority being found in love, care, and protection, but also in connection with their people, dwelling with them, being amongst them.

The Shepherds come first to Jesus in the manger, I think to tell us something about what this new-born King is to be. Their gift – his First Gift – of a lamb tells us about his future ministry and identity – and ours. Shepherd who is Lamb. Lambs, who can be shepherds.

And in those *I will* promises, we see the love and abundant power to provide that is God – I will feed them, he says, and not just feed but on *rich* pasture, on *good* grazing land. I will wrap in strength, and healing. I will judge - and lift up the poor, and bring down the mighty. Today, on this feast, we are reminded that our God who promises us the tenderest of love is also a God of Power. The power to deliver on those promises, even if not always in the ways we expect.

Ezekiel reminds us of the story of David.

Remember the might of little David as he destructs mighty Goliath, as he had the lions that attacked his lambs – with the small stone of faith that brings down the giants of oppression and despair.

I am that stone of faith, says the Lord - the Cornerstone rejected by the builders. I am the Shepherd King. *And I will feed with justice.* I am where you find the small, the lowly, the overlooked, bringing down the impossible in the grace of God.

And he tells us we, also, are to be *living stones* in the kingdom of God[1].

Jesus talks in the gospel about separating the sheep and the goats.

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[1] **1 Peter 2:5-9**

It took real judgement, by the way, in Palestine, to discern between goats and sheep. On the outside, they looked virtually identical. You had to know them often, by how they responded to your call.

We are all both sheep and goat. A mixture of good and bad. But Jesus stays firm in that loving *I will.* I will separate, he promises, the good from the bad. One to the left and one to the right – just as he promises us he will set our *sins as far from us as the East is from the West*. He will give us a chance for perspective, a chance for healing, chance for growth. A chance to respond to his call.

He promises us "eternal punishment"... which sounds a bit scary – but the Greek root of that word "punishment" is κόλασης – it originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better[2]... he is promising to bring us back to what really matters. Cutting away the dead wood, the noise and bluster, the 'goat' within us ... pruning away the things in us that pull us away from love, away from our true selves....
restoring the sheep within us so we can grow in love again.

So we can grow into ourselves in Christ, as lambs in his flock, as shepherds in the sheepfold of the world.

And yes – both of those things. This is not a gospel, actually, about what we can do for others, in some sort of false sense of superiority. That somehow we have something to give to the poor, and they have nothing to give to us. It's a gospel about what we can be together, when we find Jesus giving himself to us, even as we reach out; and when we find Jesus within us, even when we feel we have nothing to bring[3].

He says... in so far as you did these things to the least of my sisters and brothers... you did it to *me* .... You will find me.... in the *least of these*... the humble...the poor, the vulnerable ...

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[2] Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn, *Good Goats: Healing our Image of God,* Paulist Press, New York, 1994, p.86

[3] Nadia Bolz-Weber *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*

Which means we meet Jesus in showing love to the needy, but we also encountering him there, giving us something that we ourselves need, as he always does.

The sheep and goats in our gospel are *both* astonished. *No One expected the King of All Time* to side with the powerless and oppressed. Let alone identify himself as *being one of them*.
The shepherd who is a lamb, shows us how to be lambs that can be shepherds.

For it's not the great powers of might and oppression that get the final say. It is Love.

Tyrants come and tyrants go. But Love endures.

In the small, in the simple, in what is left when all the bluster and noise is stripped away. In what is shared together, and what grows by bringing life from within, and discovering it there waiting for us.

The role of a King is to feed the hungry ..
come, in a few moments, to the altar
take him in the manger of your hands,
let him feed you with his very Body.

Let him fill you with his Kingship, so that you, too, may be strong to go forth and feed others with love.

Christ the King – we find him in the rejected Cornerstone, in the Cradle, in the Cross, - in the places where we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. In the simple homely things – the mud and spit that opens eyes, in the writing in the sand. In the stubborn insistence on life – the pernicious, tenacious Mustard Seed, in the yeast that works through all creation, in the silent Song of healing that calls us home to God. For these are the things that truly redeem the world.

Alongside a world that serves the love of power.
We, in Christ the King, set the Power of Love…..

And when things are dark and difficult and we cannot find the way… our Lord and King says to us the simple words, against which nothing can stand.

I will

From 'high and lifted up'
by Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy – 'Woodbine Willie'

God, the God I love and worship, reigns in sorrow on the Tree,
Broken, bleeding, but unconquered, very God of God to me.

All that showy pomp of splendour, all that sheen of angel wings,
Was but borrowed from the baubles that surround our earthly kings.

But the word that Thou hast spoken borrows nought from kings and thrones,
Vain to rack a royal palace for the echo of Thy tones.
In a manger, in a cottage, in an honest workman's shed,
In the homes of humble peasants, and the simple lives they led,

High and lifted up, I see Him on the eternal Calvary,
And two pierced hands are stretching east and west o'er land and sea.
On my knees I fall and worship that great Cross that shines above,
For the very God of Heaven is not Power, but Power of Love.