



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Sunday before Advent – Sermon for 10.00am 22 November 2020
Bible Readings: Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24 & St Matthew 25: 31-end
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Sovereignty

Today, we celebrate Christ the King. What, however, are the attributes of a king and, what sets Christ apart from human sovereigns? We don't need to look far for an example. Those of us here this morning are the generation who were born either side of the change in reign from the late King to the Queen. Our Queen has no current equal in the fine example of sovereignty she displays, which attributes she doubtless learnt from her late father. As we know, he had not expected to be King and, therefore, his service to the nation was all the more self-sacrificial having to renounce his former quiet, family life and instead be thrust into public life and the media gaze.

It is better to give than to receive

Selfless service is, therefore, one of the attributes that contributes to the making of a good sovereign. In the gospel we heard how this selfless service is given first, without prejudice to all people, comparable to the pledge our Queen made to the Commonwealth on her 21st birthday. Second, service to others is undertaken without giving any thought to the personal commitment whether of time or money and third, it is given without seeking any reward. A further attribute was found in the reading from Ezekiel, we heard that good leadership is not imperious but is offered as a shepherd as care for his sheep. It is this reading from Ezekiel that I would like to consider more closely. The reason Ezekiel was moved to speak was to castigate the actions of the leaders of God's people in Jerusalem. He accused them of grasping exploitation, which had left their people powerless and vulnerable and, ultimately, this led to the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian empire. Ezekiel, urges his countrymen to focus on the consequences of their leadership failure and how it could have been exercised.

There's a right way and a wrong way of leading

The leaders' irresponsible actions caused God's own sheep to be scattered amongst many neighbouring nations. The displaced Jews are defenceless aliens in a foreign country where heathen gods are worshipped, which threatens their Jewish identity and faith. God, however, has compassion on his flock and determines to send them a Shepherd after his own heart to lead them into paths of righteousness and peace. Ezekiel's words are reminiscent of Psalm 23, the 'Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.' Ezekiel's writings also presage St John's Gospel, when Jesus declares himself to be the Good Shepherd of God's sheep. The message of the writings is to emphasise the difference between human care and divine care, for in just 11 verses

Ezekiel says God will act in favour of his sheep, not once, not twice but 20 times. He will give them a shepherd, he will seek the lost, he will feed his flock, we will give them springs of living water, he will strengthen the weak and so much more.

With privilege comes responsibility: ecologically

The sheep are given a wealth of privileges, which prompts me to ask, what is the responsibility of the sheep in return? We heard in the reading that some of the sheep were butting the weaker animals out of the way and trampling on the lush pastures that others could have benefitted from. If we take an ecological viewpoint, it is a reminder to all of us that in our material consumption we ensure that we do not trample on the metaphorical pastures of others who do not have the same buying power as ourselves.

With privilege comes responsibility: spiritually

If we take a spiritual viewpoint, it is a reminder to us that we benefit from being in a worshipping community of like-minded sheep following the Good Shepherd. Here at church drawing on inwards strengths to be outward looking we have sought ways to ensure that our church is inclusive and welcoming of all people. Importantly, though, the person we seek to project is not ourselves but rather our God who loves his people. Just as Ezekiel in his day wanted the exiles to understand that God cares for his people this is still the message of our faith today. We cannot redeem ourselves; salvation only comes from God and this is the message he asks us to serve him by sharing.

All for one and one for all

A final thought. God seeks to draw all into his one flock and fold; however, he gives us one warning 'I will judge between sheep and sheep.' It is incumbent on those living within the safety of one flock and fold to follow the attributes of the Good Shepherd. His selfless love and respect for all must reign, in our hearts and minds in the full knowledge that our Good Shepherd even laid down his life to save each one of his sheep. As the season of Advent approaches may it be our heartfelt desire that God will stir up our wills so that we will bring forth abundant fruit of good works, through Jesus Christ our Lord, our Shepherd and our King.

Amen.