



A SERMON

by Rev. Marcella Auld Glass: November 23, 2025



THANKSGIVING IS THIS WEEK, and as we enter worship, I invite us to consider the things for which we are thankful. Gratitude is not about ignoring the pain and harm of the world. Gratitude helps us see the pain of the world with a broader lens. It puts our troubles in perspective and orients us to hope.

The practice of daily gratitude improves mental and physical health. It brings down blood pressure and helps us sleep better. It re-orient us to compassion and care for ourselves and others.

As we prepare for Thanksgiving, I invite us to make the practice of giving thanks a daily venture, not just a once-a-year holiday. Even on the worst days, I can always find something for which to be thankful.

The poet David Whyte says this about Gratitude:

"Gratitude is not a passive response to something we have been given, gratitude arises from paying attention, from being awake in the presence of everything that lives within and without and beside us. Gratitude is not necessarily something that is shown after the event, it is the deep, a-priori state of attention that shows we understand and are equal to the gifted nature of life.

Gratitude is the understanding that many millions of things must come together and live together and mesh together and breathe together in order for us to take even one more breath of air, that the underlying gift of life and incarnation as a living, participating human being is a privilege; that we are miraculously, part of something, rather than nothing. Even if that something is temporarily pain or despair, we inhabit a living world, with real faces, real voices, laughter, the color blue, the green of the fields, the freshness of a cold wind, or the tawny hue of a winter landscape....

Thankfulness finds its full measure in generosity of presence, both through participation and witness. We sit at the table as part of every other person's world while making our own world without will or effort, this is what is extraordinary and gifted, this is the essence of gratefulness, seeing to the heart of privilege. Thanksgiving happens when our sense of presence meets all other presences. Being unappreciative might mean we are simply not paying attention."

Let us worship this morning in joy and gratitude.

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

Luke 1:67-79

"Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for God has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. The Lord has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus God has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that they swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

TODAY IS REIGN OF CHRIST SUNDAY. We used to call it Christ the King Sunday, because every so often we humans forget how oppressive and terrible kings can be. And then people come along and remind us.

Lifting up the image of Jesus as king is different than some human wanna be kings we might be thinking of, but it is still an image that carries with it economic and political inequality. It is an image that uses "divine right" as an excuse for all sorts of abuse.

It is worth considering what we mean when we say “Jesus is Lord”, or “Christ is King”. Language can be multivalent and carry many different understandings, and so we extricate our understandings of the words from the oppressive use, without abandoning them entirely, making sure our language and our theology are not at odds. To say Christ is King is not to say he lives in a gold palace that was funded by economic exploitation of the people he claims to serve. It isn’t about pageantry, ballrooms, and displays of power designed to separate him from the people he serves.

When we say Christ is King, we acknowledge that our one allegiance is to God and not to any human king. We acknowledge that there is no place, in life or in death, where God is absent or unconcerned. We live in God’s realm, God’s kingdom, where the entirety of our lives are of importance to God. And our work is to point people to a different way of being than we hear of from earthly kings.

Our call as Christians is to help the world imagine a better way of being—a world where we care for our neighbors, where we share our abundance to build a stronger community, where we trust in the goodness of God that allows us to live in hope and not fear.

Reign of Christ Sunday is also the last day of the Liturgical calendar, the culmination of the story that is told throughout the Christian year. Next week our church calendar begins again, as we enter Advent, the time of preparation for the birth of Jesus at Christmas.

And one of the images we get today, on Christ the King Sunday, is that of shepherd. It is a very different image than Christ the Military General, or Christ the Prime Minister, President, or Dictator. Christ the Shepherd depicts a king who guides, who watches out for the flock, who cares for the weak and searches for the lost.

We find comfort in the 23rd psalm, which has the lovely imagery of “he makes me lie down by still waters”, where goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives and our cups runneth over. Even if we weren’t raised on a farm, we can probably see the ‘Lord as our shepherd’ as a safe and comforting image.

Jeremiah’s passage reminds us, however, that when we shepherd each other, we do a less than perfect job of it. While God does and will continue to raise up good shepherds for the flock, there will always be the shepherds who are being addressed here.

“Woe to you who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture....”

Bad shepherds—people who are entrusted with the care of God’s children and end up hurting them, dividing them, and leaving them victim to the predators who lurk on the hillsides of our lives, are not a new phenomena. Jeremiah’s world had them too.

What is our call as Christians to respond to the bad shepherds? Jeremiah is not silent about their abuse. We often are. Sometimes silence is our response because we don’t know what to do.

Sometimes it is our response because we don’t think it is our issue to address.

Sometimes it is our response because we are busy, and tired, and distracted by other things.

But then I think about sheep, and how the biblical stories continue to compare us to them. And I look at the pain in the world and see us running around as proverbial sheep without shepherds, and I see how the silence of well-meaning people contributes to the harm.

When we see sheep in need of help, and we sit there on the hillside, thinking “*well, those sheep are in another flock. Not my problem*”, are we being like Jeremiah’s bad shepherds?

Jeremiah calls out this terrible behavior when he sees it. He doesn’t sit silently when he sees bad behavior because he recognizes silence is complicity. And there are costs to Jeremiah when he speaks out. He is beaten. He is imprisoned. He is sent to Egypt with other exiles.

Jeremiah doesn’t like being the guy who is always saying the things that will get him in trouble. In chapter 20 he says,

*If I say, ‘I will not mention God, or speak any more in his name’,
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.’*

Our silence might keep us out of trouble in the short term, but the long-term price of our silence is high.

Today after worship, I’ll be talking about my trip to Berlin this summer to study Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the 20th Century German theologian who was murdered for his opposition to fascism and the Nazi party. One quote from him has stayed with me, in particular. He wrote:

“Peace is confused with safety. But there is no way to peace on the way to safety.”

I think we mistake silence for peace too. And there is no way to peace if you’re on the path of silence.

This past week, the President of the United States insulted two female reporters who had the temerity to ask him questions. ABC reporter Mary Bruce asked him and the Saudi crown prince about the murder of fellow journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Intelligence sources solidly connect the Saudi crown prince to the murder of Khashoggi. *Think of the courage it takes to ask the man who murdered your colleague about that murder.* And here's part of what President Trump said in reply, after he said, "things happen", as justification for Khashoggi's death.

"It's not the question that I mind; it's your attitude. I think you are a terrible reporter. It's the way you ask these questions... You're a terrible person and a terrible reporter."

The next day, when Bloomberg reporter Catherine Lucey tried to ask why he had not yet released the Epstein files, he said, "Quiet! Quiet, piggy."

I trust we can all agree that the president's behavior is unacceptable and not the kind of sexism, bullying, and callous cruelty we want to see from our elected leaders.

But the part of it that upset me the most was the silence by the other reporters and elected leaders present when it happened. He took questions from other reporters after he'd said each of those terrible things. The only question that should have been asked of him after those displays was ***"What in the world did you just say to our colleague? We'll return to our questions after you apologize to her."***

By their silence, he was given the message that it is okay to demean women who ask questions.

Jeremiah reminds us to call out terrible behavior, even when it may seem impolite, or maybe not our place. ***Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord.***

We cannot be silent. And we have been quiet for too long while our neighbors are being harmed.

Jeremiah is *not just* a grouchy person who likes to pass judgment on God's behalf, although he is that ... he is also the bearer of good news. The point of his critique is to bring people back to God's vision for the world. And he promises that God will raise up shepherds who will deal justly with the people so they will not have to fear, and will not be dismayed, and will not get lost.

What we speak into the silence has to be good news for the people.

The gospel passage assigned for today's reading tells the story of Zechariah. He will be the father of John the Baptist, but before that he was a priest in the Temple. And in an encounter with an angel in church one day, what he speaks to the angel is of doubts and concerns. "How will I know this is true?", he asks. The angel's response is to silence him. He leaves church that day and cannot speak a word for nine months.

Listen to these words from the 1st chapter of Luke's gospel:

On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, No; he is to be called John.' They said to her, None of your relatives has this name.' Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, His name is John. And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for God has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. The Lord has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus God has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that they swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Zechariah finally gets his voice back when he acknowledges his wife was correct (*let it be noted*) and verifies that this child is to be called John, as the angel said, even though everyone else thought his name should be Zechariah Junior. And after supporting his wife, the next thing he speaks out of his silence is a word of hope for the world. He points the world toward Jesus, which is what John his son will grow up to do.

Both Zechariah and Jeremiah's prophecies call us to create a world better than the world of fear, division, and cruelty that we see on the news. They call us to speak out against injustice so we can guide our feet into the way of peace. In Jesus, we see how God was dreaming for a leader for God's people. And it does not look like we expected it to look. It is not military strength or political posturing. It is being present with people and standing with them in the midst of the worries and troubles of their lives. When Christ is King, he looks like a shepherd, gathering the lost sheep and caring for the flock.

In Jesus, we recognize the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy and in his life we see how not to be bad shepherds, but faithful ones.

How can we be helpful shepherds, filled with compassion for God's flock? And I mean that quite literally. How are we going to care for the sheep?

And it can't only be silent prayer from the sidelines, although that is important too. I think about the times in my life where I was facing struggle and I never knew what people meant when they said, "I'm praying for you". That can mean a lot of things. And when prayer happens in silence, you never know where you stand.

When prayer happens in conjunction with action, though, you feel the love and support of the prayer.

The people who have been shepherds to me in my distress were not silent people.

They were shepherds who stood next to me with their rod and their staff to comfort me.

They were shepherds who prepared a feast for me, or at least took me out to lunch or brought a casserole to my home after I'd had surgery.

They were shepherds who made me lie down in green pastures when I was overwhelmed and exhausted.

They were shepherds who advocated on my behalf and called me back to right paths for his name's sake.

While their actions were not always loud, they were never silent. I knew they were with me, and for me, and that I was not alone.

Even when we feel weary, when the job seems to never end, when the needs of the community seem like a bottomless well that we can never fill, we are still called to have compassion for the world, because they are like sheep without a shepherd. And they need to know we are with them and for them, because God is with and for them, and that they are not alone.

I invite you to be a good sheep, and be led by the still waters to have your soul restored. And then we'll come back together to be good shepherds and have compassion on the crowd. Because friends, the good news is that no matter how crazy this world is, we are not sheep without a shepherd. We have a shepherd in Jesus who will never forsake his flock and who is with us through it all.

Thanks be to God. Amen.