

## Order of Worship for November 26, 2023

### Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

### Opening Hymn: “*Wake, Awake, For Night is Flying*” - Hymn #516

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C: Amen.**

### First Lesson: Colossians 1:13-20

R: He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

R: Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### Confession and Forgiveness:

(Based on Colossians)

P: Grace and peace to you from God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**C: Amen**

P: In our sin we are alienated from God and enemies because of our evil behavior.

**C: By ourselves we are dead in our sins and in the uncircumcision of our sinful nature. Lord, forgive us.**

P: God has reconciled you by Christ’s physical death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

**C: He forgave us our sins, cancelled the written code which stood against us, and nailed it to the cross.**

P: We are buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him through faith in the power of God,

**C: so we can cloth ourselves as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Amen.**

### Hymn of Praise: “*Lord Jesus Christ, the Church’s Head*”- Hymn #647

### Psalm: 90

P: LORD, You have been our dwelling place

**C: in all generations.**

P: Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world,

**C: from everlasting to everlasting You are God.**

P: You return man to dust

**C: and say, “Return, O children of man!”**

P: For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past,

**C: or as a watch in the night.**

P: You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,

**C: like grass that is renewed in the morning:**

P: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;

**C: in the evening it fades and withers.**

P: For we are brought to an end by Your anger;

**C: by Your wrath we are dismayed.**

P: You have set our iniquities before You,

**C: our secret sins in the light of Your presence.**

P: For all our days pass away under Your wrath;

**C: we bring our years to an end like a sigh.**

P: The years of our life are seventy,

**C: or even by reason of strength eighty;**

P: yet their span is but toil and trouble;

**C: they are soon gone, and we fly away.**

P: Who considers the power of your anger,

**C: and Your wrath according to the fear of You?**

P: So teach us to number our days

**C: that we may get a heart of wisdom.**

P: Return, O LORD! How long?

**C: Have pity on Your servants!**

P: Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love,

**C: that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.**

P: Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us,

**C: and for as many years as we have seen evil.**

P: Let Your work be shown to Your servants,

**C: and Your glorious power to their children.**

P: Let the favor of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us;

**C: yes, establish the work of our hands!**

### **Prayer:**

P: Lord God, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, always keeping mind the end of all things and the day of judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of life here and may live with You forever in the world to come, through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

### **Second Lesson: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24**

R: “For thus says the LORD GOD: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out My sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the

peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I Myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD GOD. 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, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. “Therefore, thus says the LORD GOD to them: Behold, I, I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue My flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, My servant David, and He shall feed them: He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.

R: Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Third Lesson: Matthew 25:31-46**

P: “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on his glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.’

“Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

P: Lord, have mercy on us.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

### **Children’s Message**

**Sermon Hymn:** “*Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us*” - **Hymn #711**

**Sermon: "Shepherding the Sheep" - Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24**

Have you ever made a mistake that the whole world could see? That happened at the beginning of November. Two astronauts at the International Space Station were working on a solar array, and lost one of their tool bags. Because of the reflective coating on the bag, it can be seen from Earth using just binoculars. One simple mistake and the world can see it.

Leaders make mistakes, as well, that are often very visible. Fans think they can call better plays than Brian Ferenz, or Nate Scheelhaase, or manage a baseball game better than David Ross or Oliver Marmol. Presidential gaffes may make for good fodder for comedians, but don't make for good leadership or problem-solving. Congressmen who put their own ambitions over their constituents' needs create partisan gridlock that causes problems in our nation and beyond. Failures of leadership cause disillusionment and distrust, and hurts not just the leaders, but the people they're leading.

As we hear Ezekiel this morning, we hear an oracle that describes the failure of Judah's leaders, especially their pre-exilic kings, as well as God's plan to correct the disastrous situation. Ezekiel, sitting in a slave labor camp at the edge of Babylon, can see the results of the many mistakes the leaders, the shepherds of Israel, had made. As Lawrence Boadt writes in his commentary on Ezekiel, "Ezekiel lived through the greatest crisis in ancient Israel's history: the final destruction of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem; the loss of independence in the promised land, exile of all the leading citizens to Babylonia; and the tearing down of the temple and the removal of the House of David from kingship."

How are the people to go forward without the land given to them by God? How are they to worship God without a temple? Who will be their leader? The devastating experience of exile brings a new understanding of God and God's relationship with the people. The exile has exposed the leadership responsible for helping the weak and defenseless. Israel has been thrown to wild animals and needs a rescuer.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel...the weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them" (Ezekiel 34:2, 4). Ezekiel is referring to Judah's last four kings—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. They fleeced the flock, caring only for themselves. Ezekiel the pastor to those in exile says to the political leaders of his time, "You shepherds have fed yourselves and have not fed my sheep." These leaders ought to be caring for the sheep, not exploiting them and fattening their own lives.

But Ezekiel knows that it's not just the kings to blame. While the shepherds inflicted suffering on the sheep, the sheep themselves were not without blame. They couldn't just cry out that they were victims, that they were being oppressed, and were therefore in the right. Yes, the battered flock was oppressed by the wild animals of Babylon, and by their leaders who had been bad shepherds. Yet they still had bullies in their midst. The sin was not just outside of them. The sin was inside, as well.

Humanly speaking, Israel's problems were unsolvable. A human shepherd cannot do all that needs to be done. A human shepherd cannot bind up the broken and seek and save the lost.

Even were a human shepherd inclined to do those things, the tasks are too big. Sheep are desperate for this new shepherd.

What will the Lord do? He will take matters into his own hands. “Behold, I, I myself will seek ... I will search for my sheep ... I will search for my sheep... I will rescue. I will bring them ... I will gather them ... I will bring them ... I will shepherd them ... I will shepherd them. I myself will shepherd ... I myself will cause them to lie down.” (Ezekiel 34:11–15) In five verses God refers to himself seventeen times. Talk about taking matters into your own hands!

The new shepherd that would come was Jesus. He came to be the good shepherd for the sheep. He came to fulfill everything that the shepherds of Israel, their kings and religious leaders, had failed to do. And then he died on the cross, the sacrifice to make up for all of the mistakes made by shepherd and sheep alike. All that their mistakes, all that their sin deserved, was placed on him on the cross. All that our mistakes, all that our sin deserved, was placed there, too.

How good is this Shepherd? When we wander astray, he leaves the ninety-nine and comes searching for us. When we are confused by the voices of demons and devils, he calls us by name. When we get lost in the lunacy of life, he loves us and forgives us. The Messiah gathers us into his arms until we are better, holds us until we can live with the hurt, and carries us close to his loving heart forever.

As the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life out of love for us, and calls us to follow him in laying down our lives for each other out of love. But Jesus didn't only die for us; he lives for us, as well. Because Jesus lives, we too live new lives, lives of sacrifice and service.

God sends the messiah to be their shepherd and prince. God secures for them a covenant of peace. God provides security in the midst of everything. God speaks to them directly.

Our reading from Ezekiel this morning ends with the reassuring words “I am the LORD; I have spoken.” That is, everything said in this chapter is a promise, and God's promise is true.

One newer tradition about this Sunday, the last one of the church year, is that it is celebrated as Christ the King Sunday. It was instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925 in response to the growing nationalism and fascism that was beginning to take hold following World War I. The aim of the feast day was to refocus the church on Christ as its leader instead of the allure of earthly powers. Ezekiel's message too reminds us not to put our trust in earthly princes or powers, but to instead follow Christ our Good Shepherd.

As the end of the semester approaches, as life continues to be full of change, as pain still comes into our lives, remember that you are all sheep of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for you, to forgive you for all the things that will go wrong, to sustain you and lead you in the ways that you should go. When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus is with you. Through him, you live. In him, you die. And, by him, you will be raised to eternal life.

This is the Good News of the Good Shepherd: where we failed, Jesus succeeded. Where we made mistakes, Jesus erases them and covers them up. Where we fail to lead well, or follow well, He leads us beside still waters. Where we cast blame and make excuses, he takes on the responsibility. When you fear that you have wandered far from the fold, Jesus finds you and

brings you back. And when you know that you have nothing, absolutely nothing, to offer God, he offers you himself. This has nothing to do with what kind of sheep we've been. It has everything to do with the love and mercy of the Good Shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd, and he lays down his life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd is with you and before you and in you—and for you. That's a promise we can trust.

### **Prayer of Hope:**

P: Lord God, many times we see no hope for the future, no reason to go on.

**C: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What does it profit us for all our labor under the sun?**

P: We can find no lasting comfort in this world.

**C: We remember that in former times we were separated from Christ, enemies of Your children, and that You had promised us no hope. We were lost without You, without hope.**

P: Comfort, comfort, Your people.

**C: You have promised, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem."**

P: Help us to see that our hope is in Jesus Christ.

**C: To us You have chosen to make known the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in us, the hope of glory.**

P: Remind us of Jesus' words, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me."

**C: "I will not leave You as orphans; I will come to You. Here on earth You have many trails and sorrows, but cheer up, for I have overcome the world."**

P: Keep us from putting our trust in anything except You.

**C: "Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground. On that very day their plans will come to nothing. Happy is he whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD, our God."**

P: Give to us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom You send in Jesus' name to teach us and remind us of what Jesus said,

**C: that we may encourage one another and build up one another, that we warn those who are lazy, comfort the timid, support the weak, and be patient with everyone.**

P: For our hope is laid up in heaven which we have heard in the Word of truth, the Gospel.

**C: We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.**

P: Put us next to the cross where we hear Jesus' words to the thief in the face of hopelessness,

**C: "Truly, I say to you. Today you shall be with me in paradise."**

### **Prayers**

#### **Lord's Prayer**

**Closing Prayer:**

P: Almighty and ever-living God, before the earth was formed and even after it ceases to be, You are God. Break into our short span of life and let us see the signs of our final will and purpose in Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

**C: Amen.**

**Blessing (Pastor)**

**C: Amen**

**Closing Hymn:** *“The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns”* – **Hymn #348**