

“Serve Others!” A sermon by Lee Ireland  
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church  
November 26, 2017 Christ the King Sunday  
Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24, Matthew 25: 31-46

Let us pray together: **Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.**

What does it feel like when you don't get picked? You may remember not getting picked to be on the baseball team until the last pick – because you're not that good. Or you may not have gotten picked to join an exclusive club? You may have not gotten picked to sing in an elite choir or to be a part of a fashion show.

It seems that humans like to divide into groups. The group of folks who attend this church. The group that can afford to belong to the country club. The group that lives in the 'right' neighborhood. The group you're comfortable socializing with. We humans tend to cluster ourselves into like-minded, and sometimes, economically based groups.

This doesn't just happen. You and I make decisions, don't we, about what groups we'd like to be in and that group makes a decision whether or not the group wants you to be a part of their group.

Grouping serves a purpose in our society. We join social groups that we're comfortable in. We join churches that have belief systems similar to our own and where we're comfortable worshipping. However, grouping can have a negative side. All too often we typecast and judge the members of other groups.

When your neighbor puts up a sign for a particular candidate – one that you like – you feel a kinship with that neighbor. But when that neighbor puts up a sign for a political candidate you don't like, what happens? Do you immediately classify the individual as 'one of those people'? Your neighbor gets put into a group, a group you disagree with, a group you've pre-judged.

In religion, there are the evangelicals and the mainline Protestants. In politics, there are the liberals and the conservatives. In social circles there are often those with money and those without. In sports, in some areas of the country there are those who root for your team and those who don't.

And the list goes on. Are you part of the group who watches Fox or do you watch CNN? Of course, we know about those people who listen to one or the other, don't we? Do you listen to NPR or Rush Limbaugh? And, of course, we know about those people who listen to one or the other, don't we? Yes, we're busy judging folks and putting them in groups. And often that prevents us from opening ourselves to getting to know that individual. Heaven forbid that we might find out we like the individual or the individual has needs we can help supply.

What do our scripture lessons for today have to say about our grouping of people? God puts people in groups. So does Jesus. In our scripture lesson from Ezekiel, verse 20: **Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.** God groups the sheep into the fat sheep group and the lean sheep group. In our scripture lesson from Matthew, verse 32: **All the nations will be gathered before him (Jesus), and he will separate people one from another as**

**a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.**

Yes, God and Jesus put people into groups. But their criteria for how to group people isn't about how much money you have or who you socialize with or whether you share the same political opinions. Our great God bases the grouping on one simple measure. Jesus says in Matthew, verses 35 and 36: **'for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'** And what about God's measure from our lesson from Ezekiel? Verses 21 & 22: **Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged.**

It's rather interesting that in Ezekiel God tells us what we shouldn't do while Jesus in Matthew tells us what we should do. One negative, one positive. Perhaps that's so we see the point, the lesson, from two perspectives. Both scriptures tell us how God decides what group you're in.

God's criteria for grouping people probably are not the ones you and I use each day to judge others. These two scripture lessons reveal to us that God cares about how you care for others, for God's flock. Jesus wants us to feed the hungry, welcome the stranger even though the stranger dresses differently or speaks with an accent or has an unpleasant odor. Jesus wants us to cloth the naked and take care of the sick and visit those who are in prison. In Ezekiel, we learn that God doesn't want us to take advantage of others, but to be kind to others. Just listen to God's words: **I will rescue. I will feed. I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strayed. I will bind up the injured. I will strengthen the weak.** Jesus echoes what God said in Ezekiel.

As humans we group people for our convenience. We pick people we're comfortable with. Do we do this so we don't have to be exposed to individuals who might need our help or place a demand on us?

Just as we pick our friends today by human criteria, God will pick us by God's criteria when our time comes. And God is telling us the criteria by which we will be picked! Nice that God gives us this information in advance!

Every Sunday I welcome people with the words that those who attend this church live, love and serve as Jesus did here on earth. We know that Jesus, while he was on earth, fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked and took care of the sick. That's our example. Jesus wants us to serve others. Today's scriptures reinforce Jesus' teachings.

Last week, I asked you to see your time, talents and treasures through a new lens, through new glasses viewing the world knowing that everything belongs to God. This week I'd like to ask you to look through a new lens as you view what you do each day as you encounter people on the street, in the store, at home, in school, at a restaurant. Are you treating them as God asks you to treat them?