Sermon – November 22, 2026

So, as I was preparing for today's sermon, I came across a commentary by Diana Butler Bass. And she asked an important question. She asked, "Are we sheep or are we goats?" And I thought that was a really good self-examining question for today as we wrestle with this text. Because at the end of the ages, when Jesus returns, each of us is going to be judged, whether we were a sheep or a goat.

So how many sheep do I have here? How many goats do I have here? Very smart back there, Maggie.

Because today we're sheep. Look at all of this that we have brought so that we can raise money to help our neighbors. Wow. But I'm guessing we've all been goats.

I have a confession. When the gentleman was parked on the edge of our property for about a week, and he would come into the office, I got really uncomfortable. I have to admit that I even locked the door and didn't let him in. I was a goat. I was a goat. And I wondered if that's really the right thing to do. But, you know, the world says, "Stay safe." But am I seeing him as Jesus? Or am I seeing him as a threat?

So we're going to have to answer the question. We're going to have to stand in front of the judge. Were we sheep or were we goats? But I'm wondering, and I'm hoping, that's really the wrong question.

Because Jesus tells this parable right before he is arrested. He tells this parable right before he is tried and led away to be crucified, and right before all of his disciples run away in fear, even though just a few hours ago they said, "We will never leave you." This is the very last teaching of Jesus before his resurrection. And I wonder if the placement of this text today on Christ the King Sunday, the actions connected to the text, change the question for us.

Because if you read the text, both the sheep and the goats ask, "When did we see you hungry or thirsty or naked or a stranger or in prison?" And actually, these are all things that happened to Jesus. And he certainly experienced a lot of goats in his crucifixion because he was arrested. He was thirsty. We heard him on the cross asking for something to drink. He was naked. He was a stranger. And no one, almost no one, came to his aid. The disciples were the goats.

And when he cries, "I am thirsty," no one hears him except the soldiers that offer him a sponge of sour vinegar. Simon of Cyrene carried his cross, and after he dies, Joseph of Arimathea clothed him and welcomed his body by providing a tomb for him.

"When did you see me?" None of the disciples passed the test. They all were goats, just like you and me.

So maybe the question needs to be different. Maybe the better question is, what makes the difference between sheep and goats?

Perhaps the difference is the lens through which the sheep looked at the world. Because they could see Jesus in the stranger. They could see the one who was hungry. They could see the one who was naked, the one who needed help. And they reached out.

So, of course, then the next thing for me to do as your pastor is say, “Pay attention. Stay awake. There’s lots of people out there that need you. Find them and go and get them.” But I still don’t think that’s the point of this text.

Because again, both the sheep and the goats ask the same question: “When did we see you, Lord?” Neither group recognized Jesus Christ the King. The sheep and the goats are both surprised by the criteria by which they are judged. It’s not about seeing Jesus. It’s about helping our neighbor.

The sheep were able to see something different. Something that allowed them to overcome their fear. Allowed them, in essence, to open the door to the stranger. Something that allowed them to not look away, but rather look into the eyes of those who needed help.

They saw something that allowed them to overcome the suspicion that makes us judge our neighbor, makes us judge if the person really needs the help or could they go to work if they weren’t lazy. They had eyes that allowed them to see something that allowed them to overcome the prejudice. The prejudice. They saw the person not as a problem, not as a statistic, not even a cause, but as a sibling in Christ.

What would happen if we put on the lens that everyone we encountered was our ohana, was our sibling in Christ, and we were called to be Christ-like to them?

So what does make the difference between the sheep and the goats? St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13, “But now faith, hope, and love abide. But the greatest of these is love.” The greatest of these is love.

Love is what allows us to see one another as ohana, as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Love is what allows us to put away our preconceived ideas, to put away those barriers that separate us. Love is what allowed Jesus to go to the cross so that we might have life eternal.

So the question isn’t, are we a sheep? Are we a goat? I’m guessing all through our life we’ll be both. One time or the other we’ll be the sheep, and one time or the other we’ll be the goat. But my prayer for all of us is that the Holy Spirit might fill us with the lens of God’s love so that we can see our neighbor as our sibling, as our ohana, as Christ. And we can serve one another and love one another. Amen.