

Nov. 20, 2011—Christ the King Sunday

“The Great Intruder”

Ezekiel 34:11-24

Ralph Parlette, in his book *The University of Hard Knocks*, says that much of what we learn in life comes the hard way. He remembered when he was three, when he was the little sunshine of his family. He sat on his little highchair throne and ruled. One day he saw something he wanted really bad. It was the coffee pot. He was about to reach for it when he heard the voice of a woman who was beside him, the most troublesome woman he had ever known, his mother. “I had not tried to do one thing in three years that that woman had not meddled into,” he said. She had said to the little sunshine, “Do not touch that coffee pot.”

The more he thought about it, the more angry he became. He had had about enough of this petticoat tyranny in his home. It was time to stop it. So he reached again for the coffee pot. And this time he got it. With it, he got about a gallon of the hottest coffee a bad boy had had ever poured on himself. For weeks the family smeared everything they could think of—apple butter, coal oil, egg, starch...anything the neighbors could think of—over the little sunshine of his family, who had been temporarily eclipsed. His mother, you see, had intruded in his life...not with physical force...but by telling him what to do. Then she would go on with her knitting while he went ahead and did it anyway. Why, he wondered, don't mothers knit these days?

I thought about this mother, this benign intruder, as I studied today's passage. It is the Sunday before Thanksgiving...but it is also Christ the King Sunday today. Next Sunday we begin to prepare for the coming of the Christ child. Today, however, is about Christ the King. This passage is about shepherds, but Ezekiel is thinking *kings*. Shepherds were a metaphor for kings. Except that kings of late hadn't served Israel well. Because kings had misruled, many of Israel's best had been marched from their land. They were far from home. They were terribly homesick.

The kind of talk I read in Ezekiel moments ago is the talk of God as intruder, someone who has had enough of bad shepherds and declared it is time to change something. We even see images of the coming Christ, the great prince of David's lineage, Christ the great *intervener*! But it's as if—for those who are powerful and do not care—there will be some judgment here!

I got the idea as I read these words that the One who promises is not terribly diplomatic about the promise. The fact is, *we no longer have a say in this*. Any voice that used to say, “It's okay, God. We've got it from here. You don't have to do anything. We didn't mean to bother you.”...Well, that voice will not be heard. We have lost control of the future. God is coming, and with God comes a sense of judgment on those who could have helped but didn't...and a sense of hope for

those who needed help and didn't get it. The words, "*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" reminds us not to pray the Lord's Prayer lightly! God's coming won't be good news for everyone! I suspect that someone's life is about to be turned upside down!

We worship a God who *doesn't* sit idly, doing nothing. This *isn't* a God who waits for us to beg and plead before God decides to get involved. God is already waiting up ahead for us, as if to ask, "What's keeping you?" And God has started acting long before we decide to join in. God is wondering, "Is there anything you would like to do to help?"

Be advised that when God intervenes...when God intrudes, well, things get all stirred up. God begins to make demands on us that weren't in our plans for the day. Our neat, convenient worlds are about to change, because too many people are lost...and too many others aren't listening! Too many people are hungry...and too many others don't care! Too many people are sick or have no home or have no family or have no hope! God begins to make not only religious demands on us, but also political demands and social demands and educational demands as well. When God gets involved, we no longer have the luxury to sit back. God isn't asking. God is waiting! Justice demands it of us. Faith demands it of us. For the Lord—the God of us all—is the King. The words say, "I, the Lord, have spoken!"

Today, I almost preached about the Last Judgment, from Matthew, also assigned for today. (Matt. 25:31-46) Jesus describes there the King who calls everyone together. It's Judgment Day, the sheep and the goats! He doesn't ask us how many times we went to church. He doesn't ask if we believed the right religious doctrine. He doesn't ask if we were good persons. He doesn't ask if we stayed out of trouble. He wants to know, did we see someone hungry and did we feed him? Or someone thirsty and did we offer her a cup of water. Did we visit someone in the hospital or in prison? And if we did, the King would say, "Good. Maybe then someone has discovered that I care." And if we saw any of those people—the hungry child, the lost stranger, the lonely prisoner, the thirsty person—if we saw a need and did nothing, well, the King would say, "What were you thinking? Someone needed you. It could have been me!"

Our God is an awesome God. Our God is a loving God. Our God intervenes, interrupts, intercedes, intrudes, is constantly busting into our world, asking more and more of us, because so many people need God's care! The Swedish bishop Krister Stendahl once said worship is worrying about what God worries about when God gets up on the morning." Meanwhile, this God broods over us this morning, sees us spiritually hungry and intervenes for us through Jesus Christ. And so we have bread. Sees we could use a cup of cold water, and in Jesus Christ it becomes the cup of forgiveness. I see the demand God makes of me...and I know I

could be better. But he still invites me...and you here and here we are. We give thanks, for our God is an awesome God! This God is about to intrude once more.