

Communion Meditation

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 23-24

Home Moravian Church, November 9, 2025 (Chief Elder communion)

With comforting words about a good shepherd, we mark the Moravian festival of November 13, celebrating Christ as Chief Elder of our church.

The occasion for this festival began with a request from one very faithful but very tired servant, Leonard Dober. In 1741, Brother Dober was the Chief Elder, and his job was to know the condition of all Moravian congregations worldwide, as well as the condition of the members' hearts. The job was impossibly comprehensive, and Brother Dober was exhausted; so he asked to step down.

Who would be the next chief elder? After days of deliberation, Moravian leaders asked Jesus Christ to serve in the office that, of course, he had actually held all along. To this day, Moravians acknowledge only Jesus Christ as the head and savior of our church. Moravians celebrate this festival with communion, and lovefeast, and specially chosen scriptural texts celebrating the good shepherd, including those words we just heard from Ezekiel. "I will set up over them one shepherd... and he shall feed them... I the Lord have spoken."

But that is not all that he, the Lord, has said.

There is more to Ezekiel than words of comfort—much more. The book of Ezekiel rages, howls, despairs, and condemns. Its words reflect their time, for the prophet Ezekiel lived to see Judah destroyed by enemy forces, its people taken captive, and, worse beyond imagining, *Jerusalem and the Temple turned to rubble*. The ancient Jewish people had considered this destruction impossible, because the Temple was the residence of the presence of God. That the

Temple had been destroyed could only mean that God had left the building. Believing Jerusalem deserted by God drove Ezekiel into wild despair, and produced a lot of deeply disturbing reading.

That we should nevertheless be comforted with verses from Ezekiel can happen only by careful selection on the part of lectionary compilers, and, on the part of us listeners, a willingness to be satisfied that the good shepherd will rescue those sheep that are scattered, lost, injured, weak—satisfied, without ever asking how the sheep got to be so bad off in the first place.

But God knows; and speaking through Ezekiel, God sounds pretty mad about it. Just listen to some verses from right before today's passage. Consider chapter 34, verses 1 through 6:

The word of the Lord came to me: ² Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: To the shepherds—thus says the Lord God: Woe, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat; you clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatted calves, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak; you have not healed the sick; you have not bound up the injured; you have not brought back the strays; you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and scattered they became food for all the wild animals. ⁶ My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them.

The reason the sheep are scattered, lost, injured, weak, is that the shepherds are no shepherds at all, and worse. Flouting God's command and their responsibility to care for these vulnerable creatures, the shepherds have ruled with such force and harshness that God, at last, finds it necessary to rescue the sheep not only from wild animals, but from the very mouths of the shepherds. Soul-starved and wicked, the shepherd who feasts on the sheep!

The raging, howling vision of Ezekiel is a world in which everyone is starving. Some starve for food, and some starve, insatiably, for power. But God will rescue the sheep by putting in place the good shepherd who seeks the lost, binds up the injured, strengthens the weak, and leads the hungry flock to rich pasture. This is what godly leadership looks like. God, the Lord, has spoken.

But that is not all that God, the Lord, has said.

For, now, while the hungry sheep safely graze, thus says the Lord God: “I will feed [the fat and the strong] with justice.” What I hear God, the Lord, saying is: everyone will be fed what they most need to swallow.

You know, when I thought that phrase up, it sounded really satisfying; but then I began to consider what might be waiting on my own plate. When I’m raging and howling, I think probably I sound like the psalmists who beg God to see things their way. “Vindicate me, O God!” they cry, when they should be saying, “Forgive me, O God.” While I’m begging for God to stuff some shepherds’ mouths with my own recipe for justice, what I myself need is probably the bread of humility.

In a world of chaos, we do rage and howl. We may feel as broken and despairing as Ezekiel, with the dust of destruction blinding us to the obvious: that God is still in the building.

Then we blink, and look around, and realize how much we sheep have been scattered. Scattered by fear. Scattered by anger that drives us apart from one another. Scattered by a lack of faith in the good shepherd—a lack of faith telling us we are on our own to find what we need. That’s hard to do, when we don’t even really *know* what we need. But our Chief Elder knows.

It is Jesus Christ alone, Jesus Christ, our Chief Elder and good shepherd, who can know every heart. Jesus Christ knows our hearts, and our very names, and our every need, including what each of us needs to be fed.

Let us approach the table in awe and reverence, with a prayer for forgiveness, and gratitude for grace; and let us ask him to feed us, now and forever. Amen.