

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 26, 2015

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

(Jeremiah 23:1-6 NIV)

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. 2) Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. 3) "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. 4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. 5) **"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.** 6) **In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.**

THE GOOD SHEPHERD CARES FOR YOU!

In the name of our Good Shepherd, my dear friends;

How do you express your concern for someone? There are many ways and obviously, the answer to that question depends a bit on the circumstances, doesn't it? Parents, how do you express your concerns for a wayward child? The answer of course will depend the age of the child. There's a difference between a toddler, a teen, and an adult child. What to do about a wayward child? The Lord faced that dilemma at the time of Jeremiah the prophet. The Lord's people had been lead astray by those whom the Lord had placed over them to lead and shepherd them. Those shepherds include both their spiritual and government leaders. Corrupt kings abused their power for personal gain. The priests, the elders, the false prophets of the day did nothing to stop the people of Judah from forsaking the Lord and following after idols. God's people were in need of some loving discipline. The discipline would come in the form of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians who would lay siege to Jerusalem and take many of its people into captivity. Because the Lord was not willing to spring this discipline on his people without warning, he sent Jeremiah – his faithful prophet to announce the Lord's displeasure with his people and to warn them of the Lord's impending discipline. For this, he was regarded as a traitor and almost lost his life. Although Jeremiah proclaimed the Lord's justice, he also was able to hold out hope to the Lord's people.

Our text for today includes messages of warning and hope as it reveals to us that

Theme: The Lord, our God Expresses His Concern for His Flock

1. By holding those who shepherd his flock accountable and
2. By sending His King to protect us.

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. The opening words of our text make it clear that the Lord had high standards for those who were the shepherd of his people. Those shepherds included the kings whom the Lord had placed over them as well as their spiritual leaders as I have already mentioned. Do these words speak to anyone today? God's word is timeless – it does speak to people today. God still provides us with individuals whom he entrusts with caring for the needs of his lambs and sheep. God holds those individuals accountable for providing the proper care for his lambs and sheep.

The Lord held the spiritual leaders of the nation of Judah accountable for their wrongs. **This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD.** The apostle Peter makes it clear that the Lord has given pastors responsibility for the souls entrusted to their care. (1 Peter 5:2-3 NIV) **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3) not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.** This suggests that the Lord has something to say to me as your pastor.

One of the basic rules of preaching is that the preacher should personally apply what the Lord says to himself so that he is prepared to assist the members of his congregation in applying what the Lord says to them.

The spiritual leaders of Jeremiah's time had not fed God's people with his Word. As a result, the people wandered away from the Lord and followed every kind of idolatry and false worship you could think of. They adopted the heathen life styles, sinful attitudes, and practices of their neighbors and their society. For this reason, the Lord declared that he would send punishment to the shepherds for their evil – the evil of neglecting the flock by failing to lead it to the green pastures and bubbling streams of God's word. The application for me and for others entrusted with the privilege of preaching and teaching the Lord's people is to proclaim the Word of the Lord boldly in all its truth and purity – the Law as well as the Gospel to nurture the faith of the Lord's flock. If I were addressing a group of pastors at a conference today – there would be more specific applications and comments I could share – applications and comments, which I have personally taken to heart in my prayerful consideration of these words.

I'm not talking to pastors today – but I am speaking to others whom the Lord holds accountable for the spiritual welfare of others. Many of you, together with me, are parents whom the Lord has blessed with the opportunity to nurture and care for our children in the ways of the Lord as the Lord reminds us in Proverbs 22:6 **Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.** While not denying the essential role that mothers play in the spiritual training and instruction of their children, the apostle Paul speaks loudly and clearly to Fathers: (Ephesians 6:4 NIV) **Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** Surely as Christian parents, it is our desire for our children to be part of the Lord's family as well as our own. That is why we have them baptized, send them to Sunday School or Christian Day School where they can enjoy the opportunity to form Christian friendships as they hear God's Word and learn it. However, we can become guilty of exasperating our children by failing to teach and model what the Lord says in his word personally. Children who don't see their parents using the word for themselves often become frustrated – even to the point of becoming angry because they have to do something they don't sense is truly important to their parents. In their anger, they may even turn away from the Lord and his ways.

While none of us can force someone to follow the Lord – the Lord does hold us all accountable for following his command to make disciples of all nations – in part by teaching them everything, he has commanded us. That great commission applies to all of us. Surely, the wonderful gift of our Savior and his forgiveness compels us to share the joy of salvation.

But alas sometimes in spite of the fact that we have the desire we do not always feel like we have the tools to carry out the responsibility the Lord has given us – that's when it's time to realize that the Lord will equip those whom he entrusts with a duty. We will rejoice in the fact that the Lord has shown his concern for us by holding those who shepherd his flock accountable. Thank the Lord for your pastor and take advantage of his faithful instruction and efforts to nurture you as you gladly hear, learn, and study the Word of the Lord together with him – in Sunday worship, in Bible study and in your personal consultations with him. Take to

heart the encouragement to God gives to his people in Hebrews: (Hebrews 13:17 NIV) **Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.**

There's one more application that I feel compelled to share as the pastor in this congregation – it's an application for the youngest of those who are here today. Dear children, you are by God's little lambs – you are precious to the Lord that is why he has given you parents and teachers and a pastor who want to share God's Word and ways with you – he holds them accountable. That means that he wants them to do the job he has given them because it's important for you. God also has something he wants you to do as he expresses his concern for you – he holds you accountable for respecting them and obeying the instruction they give you. That's the "job" that God has for you!

Sadly all of us children, parents, and pastor don't always do the jobs the Lord has given us to do – thankfully God not only expresses his concern for us by holding us accountable but also by sending His King to protect us.

Our text for today continues: **"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. 4) I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.**

Once again, we see the reflection of a loving parent disciplining a wayward child reflected in the words of the Lord. At times, a loving parent will discipline a naughty child by sending the child to their room for some quiet time or making them sit on their chair for a time out. Perhaps a parent will separate the child from their friends by grounding them for a time. The Lord admits that he is the one who had driven his wayward people to various countries – but this is a temporary situation. He himself will tell them when they can return to their pasture where they will once again experience the generous care and provisions of the one who loves them and expresses his concern for them in so many wonderful ways.

Perhaps we have felt the loving hand of discipline. Perhaps we have felt separated from the Lord at times – maybe even because we abandoned him. The Lord never stops caring for us. The Lord governs all that happens to us and assures us that: (Romans 8:28 NIV) **God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

Through his prophet the Lord pictures the New Testament Christian Church for us – the age of the apostles and their faithfulness to the Lord in proclaiming the message of the Lord our righteousness surely is a fulfillment of these words. The apostle Paul describes the fulfillment of this prophecy when he reminds us that our ascended King continues to provide for his church. (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV) **Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, (12) to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...** In the church today, the Lord is still providing shepherds for his people in answer to their prayers and calling as we have already discussed. It is indeed a humbling privilege to be able to serve you as a called servant of Christ – knowing that the Lord has given me the awesome privilege of serving as your shepherd. It is my humble request that you would thank the Lord for allowing me to serve even as you pray for me asking the Lord to enable me to serve you and him faithfully.

The Lord's promise to send and bless the work of faithful shepherds is connected inseparably to his promise to send his King to protect us. This King is none other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – God's own son. Listen to Jeremiah's wonderful description – a description provided by the Lord himself of our Savior King.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. 6) In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.

By the time of Christ, the royal line of David was dead and gone. Yet from this line a King would come – both the prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah describe this King as a branch. Isaiah helps us to understand the OT term “branch” that Jeremiah used when he says: (Isaiah 11:1-2 NIV) **A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. (2) The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD--**

If you have ever seen a new tree sprout from the roots of a tree that has been cut down – then you will understand exactly what Jeremiah is saying about the righteous branch who would be guiltless and holy before the Lord and his people. The Lord Jesus came from the line of David and lived the perfect life that Jeremiah foretold. He lived that life for us and he offered that life for us so that his righteousness might be ours. He saved us from the curse of sin, from death and from slavery to the devil and his sinful ways – he has called us to live in his pastures and has prepared a royal banquet for us in heaven as the 23rd Psalm so eloquently reminded us. In Christ Jesus, our safety and security are sure.

Just as we have many ways to express our concern for those we love so the Lord also has many ways to express his concern for us. As we have discovered

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May the Lord our God enable us to love him in response to his concern for us. Amen.