

Last Sunday after Pentecost – Christ the King November 24, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Jeremiah 23:2-6 (NIV)

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 to 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 Righteousness.

Dear friends in Christ:

Imagine for a moment a picture of a shepherd. What do his clothes look like? How about his face and skin? What does he carry in his hands? Perhaps you visualized a rather strong looking individual with old dungy clothes and dry weathered skin carrying a lamb or a staff in his hands. Maybe you imagined a picture like this rather idealized artist's picture of a shepherd.

Now think about a king. What image comes to mind? What do his clothes look like? How about his face and skin? What does he have in his hands? Perhaps you imagined someone tall and handsome with regal clothing, soft and velvety perhaps. His skin might have a bit of glow. He might be wearing a crown and holding a staff or a sword in his hand. Maybe you imagined a picture like this one of King George the Fifth at his coronation back in 1911.

When we put these two pictures side-by-side we quickly notice that shepherds and kings don't have much in common at least on the surface. But since you can't judge a book by its cover or a person by their clothes let's compare the "heart" of a good king and the "heart" of a good shepherd. Kind, caring, compassionate – those are adjectives we could use to describe the shepherd who tenderly cares for the sheep and lambs in his flock protecting them from danger and providing for their needs. Couldn't we also use those same words for a good king who is interested in protecting and providing for the citizens in his kingdom?

Shepherds and kings may not look alike but they might just have several traits in common. And perhaps this helps us to understand why the Bible teaches us that

Theme: The Good Shepherd is our King

1. He lovingly cares for us
2. He provides us with righteousness

Jeremiah served the Lord for 42 years faithfully proclaiming the Word of the Lord to a people were being disciplined by the Lord for their unfaithfulness to him. The corruption began at the top and the people followed the sinful ways of the leaders who were to care for them and watch over them. And so the Lord sent Jeremiah to these men -- the evil kings of Judah: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin who had followed in the evil footsteps of their infamous predecessors such as Ahab, Ahaz and Mannash who pretended to worship the Lord

while also bringing their sacrifices to the false God Baal. Not only did they lead a double life they also allowed and encouraged the people to do the same.

The Lord sent Jeremiah to them with this message: **“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. 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.**

The Lord would go into action to protect, nurture and care for the people whom had been scattered and driven away from the Lord by their evil shepherds and kings. He care for them as a true shepherd protecting them from the evil ways of false spiritual leaders. **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.**

During the times of Jeremiah, the Babylonians had deported and scattered many of the Jewish people. The Lord promised to bring them back from the captivity which he had allowed to happen as a discipline for them. He would allow them to flourish and to increase in number. He will provide spiritually minded shepherds to watch over them to calm their fears and to keep them safe.

He will be their Good Shepherd King – who would care for them by protecting them, by disciplining them, by watching over them in every situation of life and by providing them with true and lasting peace.

The Shepherd King has provided us with the same blessings. He has gathered us together, calling us away from a life of sin and into life in his kingdom, enabling us to live under his peace and forgiveness. He has provided shepherds – spiritual leaders who have pointed us to the green pastures and sweet waters of the words of the Lord for our comfort and encouragement as they assured us that the Good Shepherd is our King who lovingly provides for us.

Perhaps it will help us to appreciate the care our Good Shepherd King lovingly provides for us if we picture ourselves as sheep. To be associated with sheep is not very complimentary. Sheep are considered among the dumbest of farm animals. Sheep will follow whoever or whatever is in front of them. Sheep will wander off and not find their way back. I'm sure that you recall Jesus parable of the shepherd with 100 sheep who went off to search for the one who had wandered away. If the shepherd had not gone to search for it and found it that sheep would have never made its way back to the fold.

You and I are prone to wander like sheep. We love follow our own ideas and make our own plans without pausing to consider God's ways. Our sinful nature is more ready to listen to conventional wisdom and popular opinion than to seek out the Lord's wisdom. We've followed the temptations and believed the lies of Satan. Too often we've gotten lost in the crowds or found ourselves alone not knowing which way to turn.

That's why we need a Shepherd King – one who can lovingly provide for us Listen to Isaiah's beautiful description of our Shepherd King. **"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."** (Isaiah 40:11)

Perhaps you've seen this picture of Jesus holding a little lamb close to his heart. Put yourself in this picture. This IS OUR Good Shepherd who gathers us from our wandering ways. This is our Good Shepherd who holds us close to his heart. **We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** (Isaiah 53:6)

Our Good Shepherd blesses us here on earth by rescuing us from our sins and holding us close to his heart. He tenderly calls to us in his Word to sooth our fears and dry our tears. With his word he assures us of his eternal protection and love. **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."** (John 10:27-28) Held close to our Savior's heart we are eternally protected.

We are eternally protected because our Good Shepherd king provides us with righteousness. **5) "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to 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 Righteousness.**

The kings of Judah and Israel had not ruled wisely or done the just and proper things. They had no regard for either the physical or spiritual welfare of their subjects. Ultimately God would use the nations of the world to put an end to their royal line. But the time would come when once again God would provide a King for his people. A king from the family line of David, a king would do no wrong, a King who would provide peace and security to all who trust in him. Jeremiah calls him the Lord our Righteousness – we call him Jesus, our Good Shepherd King.

Jesus is the righteous Branch from David's line. He is a shoot or branch that comes out of the rotten and corrupted stump of the human race that is able to rescue people with his perfect righteousness. Another pastor once used a childhood memory to help his congregation understand this verse.

He told this story about a plum tree to illustrate the beauty of Jesus as the righteous branch. I recall as a child enjoying the blue plums that would come on the two plum trees next to our house. One tree died, and a few years after that a windstorm knocked over the other tree. Nothing was left except a broken off stump. But out of that stump, the original root stock of a wild plum, came a little shoot that grew into small tree. In the spring there were white blossoms and in the fall of the year there were plums that were not blue but purple and even better tasting than the other plums.

Ever since the fall of Adam into sin human beings could produce nothing but rotten fruit. From beginning to end the Scriptures declare; **Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.** (Psalm 53:3) **All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.**" (Romans 3:12) **"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23)

Contrast this with this description of Jesus. **[He was] tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.** (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus came into our world and he was a righteous branch. The fruit he produced in his life was perfect. He was the perfect King with a perfect love for people and for his heavenly Father, so different from the rest of us whose lives are marred by bad thoughts, harsh words, and failures to show love and kindness to others when we have the chance. So what does Jesus do with the perfect life he lived for us? He gives it to us as a free gift. His name tells us this gift is ours. He is the Lord Our Righteousness. His righteousness becomes ours.

He is Jesus – the one who saves us. He saves us by offering his righteousness to us and by taking our sins upon himself. **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2 Corinthians 5:21). The righteousness of Christ covers up our unrighteousness. His holiness hides our unholiness. Our sinless Savior forgives sins.

Isaiah described Jesus in this way, **He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground... But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.** (Isaiah 53:2,5)

In providing us righteousness Jesus went into battle for us. He defeated sin, death and the devil. And now he is exalted in glory as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who has promised to return again to take us to live with him in the glory of his eternal kingdom. The Apostle Peter assures us, **“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”** (1 Peter 5:4)

At first glance it may not appear that kings and shepherds have much in common. But when we're talking about Jesus we discover that he is OUR Shepherd and our King. As our Shepherd he lovingly cares for us and as our King he graciously provides us with righteousness.

The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness fails me never,
I nothing lack if I am his,
And he is mine forever.

And so through all the length of days,
Your goodness fails me never.
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise
Within your house forever. Amen. (CW 375, 1, 6)