

Men's in-person Bible Study – Wednesday, July 14, 2021 (11am) – Pentecost 8

TEXT: Jeremiah 23:1-6 — The LORD will Shepherd His People. Jesus is the Righteous Branch!

1. Words one does not want to hear from God: "You have not attended to them. So I will attend to you" (Jer. 23:2). What kind of leaders are we? Have we neglected God's sheep? These are "my people," "my flock," God's own "sheep" that the shepherds have neglected and driven away. **The shepherds** in this text would be the **leaders and rulers**, primarily the kings, who have failed in their primary task of protecting and nurturing those whom God has entrusted to their care. **Ezekiel uses a similar image** at about the same time—**heading into the exile**—spelling out in more detail the failure of the leaders. Rather than feeding the sheep, they have fed themselves, gathering the fat and the wool for their own use—literally, living off the "fat of the land." They have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bound up the injured, bought back the strayed, or sought the lost (Ezekiel 34:1-10). This failure is seen as one of the major causes of the exile. Bad leaders bring judgment not only on themselves, but wreak havoc on their entire nation (innocent suffer with the guilty).
2. We hear this text and we say, **"Is it I Lord?"** This text is **an equal-opportunity accuser**. The accusation is not meant to terrorize, but to induce repentance: To come into God's presence is a little like approaching a blast furnace. The blast furnace means us no harm, it is just hot. Hot enough, indeed, to (heal) burn away our impurities and prepare us for a new life. **When leaders fail, God says, "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock."** **First**, God becomes the shepherd, and only then does God raise up faithful leaders, including the "righteous Branch," who will deal wisely, execute justice, and allow people to live in safety. Only God can pull off this job description fully, which is why we learn in the New Testament that God has taken upon God's own son this role of the righteous messianic ruler. In the text itself, the **title given the king ("The Lord is our righteousness")** may be a play on the name Zedekiah, the last king of Judah prior to the collapse. If so, God promises something like a "new Zedekiah," one who will succeed; a new beginning for God's scattered people.
3. We are all kings, priests, shepherds; not just sheep. We are tended and cared for; called to go and do likewise as under-shepherds of Jesus. **Back and forth we go**, in and out of the sheepfold, fed to feed, blessed to be a blessing, loved in order to love, strengthened in order to give strength.

TEXT: Psalm 23 – The LORD is My Shepherd ... a FOREVER House! A song of Trust

1. The **vulnerability of sheep**. Their **only protection is in flocking**. A lost sheep is a sitting duck. Bible passages offer assurance to God's people that their Lord is with them, to lead them as their shepherd (Psalms 95:7 and 100:3), to rescue the scattered and bring them to their own land (Ezekiel 34:11-16), and to gather lambs to God's bosom and gently lead them home (Isaiah 40:11); see also Luke 15.
2. **Psalm 23, is spoken by ONE who knows fresh pain**. The writer speaks for a community that has recently walked through the darkest valley, and has emerged, trembling and stumbling and blinking in the light. Such a **story of suffering & deliverance** is told in **Psalm 22; the two psalms can be read as companions**. In response to the desperate laments of Ps. 22, the writer of Ps. 23 delightedly proclaims "trust in the Lord." The **desperation of 22 is matched by the exuberant trust of 23**. The exuberance does not erase the pain. Assurances of God's care are a salve applied precisely to the particular wounds of Ps. 22.
3. Psalm 22 describes an affliction so acute that the very body and spirit of the sufferer are wasting away. In response to this, the speaker in Psalm 23 describes **the restoration that God the Shepherd provides**. Green pastures, still waters, a rod to protect and a staff to guide all restore the soul. The table set in the presence of those enemies **refreshes the parched throat with an overflowing cup**. **God is the Host at a feast of thanksgiving, and the sufferer is the honored guest**, (head is anointed with oil). **Divine deliverance does not mean that evil is eradicated**. The Psalmist sits at table in the presence of enemies. We walk through the Valley. We don't remain there. **The House of the Lord**: our permanent residence.

TEXT: Ephesians 2:11-22 – One in Christ! TEAM Jesus! Appeal for Unity between Jews/Gentiles! Peace Child

1. Once we were not the people of God but now through the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, we have been brought near to God. As such, **God becomes our peace** instead of the keeping of religious laws. All people are **reconciled** to God through the cross and have access to him through faith. We are being built up upon the cornerstone who is Christ, and the foundation that is the apostles and prophets, into a holy dwelling for God. The Spirit of God now dwells among us, and even within us. A Temple of H.S.
2. Toward the end of Paul's second missionary journey, Paul came to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila (51-52 AD). The capital of Asia Minor, Ephesus was a large city (500,000; fourth largest city in Roman Empire). On his third missionary journey (52-57 AD), Paul made it back to Ephesus for an extended stay of 3 years. **Ephesians is divided into two parts** (DOCTRINE/Theology/Beliefs – 1:3-3:21; & DUTY/Discipleship/Behavior – 4:1-6:20). Paul preaches about our riches & responsibilities in Christ (code for Baptism). We are in Christ practicing resurrection & keeping company with Jesus. Called to grow up.
3. Ephesians 1 proclaims our **Spiritual Possessions** (adoption, redemption, and sealed inheritance) in Christ! Ephesians 2 proclaims our **Spiritual Position in Christ**. In Him, we are reconciled and set into the Temple; courtesy of Jesus/GRACE ALONE (2:1-10). Paul **THEREFORE** wants his readers to remember how far they have come as Gentiles. **Times have changed**. **Once** strangers/lost/without God (*atheoi* = atheist; only occurrence in N.T.)/no hope. **BUT NOW** brought near through the blood of Jesus. On the cross Jews and Gentiles have been made members of One Body. Gentiles are now fellow citizens with the saints, members of the Commonwealth of Israel, and part of the grand Temple with Jesus as the Cornerstone. The **DIVIDING WALL OF HOSTILITY** has been broken down (2:14 – a wall separated the court of Gentiles from the court of Israel in the Temple; to cross this boundary meant death). Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs. To marry a Gentile meant a funeral for the Jewish Family, not a wedding. **Jesus is our peace**; he preaches peace & makes peace. We are God's Building – YOUR Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. **Far off**, we have been **brought near** (God's work not ours). Vs 14-16 is one sentence in Greek indicating the unifying work of Christ. Christ is the adhesive that bonds believers together.

TEXT: Mark 6:30-44 – Compassionate Observer (Just Watching or actually practicing?) 5000+ Fed!

1. Context: Mark 6:6b-7:23 = "Witness to Jews". Having been **rebuffed at Nazareth (6:1-6)** Jesus begins his **third preaching tour**. Jesus commissions the TWELVE and sends them out in pairs with AUTHORITY. **Mark 6b-30** is another **Markan Sandwich**. The martyrdom of John the Baptist (first passion narrative) is sandwiched between the sending (6:6b-13) and the return of the Twelve (6:30). We **first heard of John's arrest** at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (**1:14**). The execution of John the Baptist forecasts **what John's death means for Discipleship and Mission with Jesus**. Mark's Gospel is a **Discipleship Manual**: "What does Baptism mean for Daily Living?" "Come and Die!" —Bonhoeffer
2. A different kind of Banquet where **Jesus presides**; not to boost his standing but to care for the poor. The feeding of the 5000 is a foreshadowing of a final banquet—The Lord's Supper (14:22). First **prerequisite of Discipleship** is **being with Jesus** (Come away with me by yourselves). Need for recuperation—so many people with so many needs that one scarcely gets a chance to eat. Apostles are kept busy! Solitude is sought, but is not found. The crowds find them in **a desolate place**. Jesus' response: COMPASSION (*splanchnizesthai*, N.T. word used only of Jesus; gut wrenching). **Jesus' compassion** is found in teaching (they are like sheep without a shepherd; military image), and feeding. The disciples offer a reasonable suggestion: Send them away to fend for themselves. Jesus says, "YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT" (200 denarii; five loaves & two fish). Disciples are coworkers with Jesus in the Mission Field. Disciples focus on their scarcity; Jesus focusses on God's abundance. **Everything depends on Jesus—the Good Shepherd!** Don't discount/explain away the miraculous (they shared). They **all** ate and were satisfied! **Leftovers: Twelve Baskets!** Keeping Company with Jesus!