

#1786
Cf. #488

Jeremiah 23:1-6¹
The LORD condemns false shepherds
but sends the Righteous Branch.
10th Sunday after Pentecost
Supplementary Lectionary Series “B,”
Old Testament, adapted

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
& Our Savior WELS Perry MI
July 28, 2013
WELS Connection Video
Potluck
Voters Quarterly Meeting
WSC & LWMS
FVBS begins

^{23:1} “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 (who shepherd) my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, behold, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the LORD. ³ “I myself will gather the remnant (leftovers) of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them (banished them, exiled them) and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and (multiply) increase in number. ⁴ I will place (establish, set, appoint) shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified (dismayed), 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 Branch of Righteousness) –
a King who will reign wisely
and do justice and righteousness in the land.

⁶ In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live (dwell) in safety.
This is the Name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteousness!”

THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK
I. BY REMOVING UNFAITHFUL SHEPHERDS
II. BY APPOINTING FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS
III. BY PROVIDING RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the Name of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who gathers his flock of believers through his Word,
Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

It was a terrible time for Judah and Jerusalem. It was a terrible time for the Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah. The leaders of the people – their prophets, priests and kings – were unfaithful. These leaders led the people away from the true God – the LORD. The

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

people willingly followed them. Therefore, the LORD himself would take action for his people – for his flock of believers. The LORD would do this through his Word in truth and purity. So we see that ... THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK. THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK ... I. BY REMOVING UNFAITHFUL SHEPHERDS; II. BY APPOINTING FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS; and, III. BY PROVIDING RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK
I. BY REMOVING UNFAITHFUL SHEPHERDS

This Chapter Twenty-Three of the Prophecies of Jeremiah speak condemningly against the false and unfaithful prophets of his day. The LORD said through Jeremiah,

¹⁶ This is what the LORD Almighty says:

***“Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you;
they fill you with false hopes.***

***They speak visions from their own minds,
not from the mouth of the LORD.***

***¹⁷ They keep saying to those who despise me,
‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’***

***And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts
they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’***

***¹⁸ But which of them has stood in the Council of the LORD
to see or to hear his Word?***

Who has listened and heard his Word?” (23:16-18).

Like the false prophets and preachers of today, these false prophets said that God is a God of love; that the LORD God was at peace with them; and they could do whatever they wanted. The people could follow whatever sinful task or wicked desire they chose, and God would neither harm or hurt them. On the contrary, God’s righteous justice and judgment was coming against them.

The LORD God continued to speak against them through his faithful Prophet Jeremiah:

***²¹ “I did not send these prophets,
yet they have run with their message;
I did not speak to them,
yet they have prophesied.***

***²² But if they had stood in my Council,
they would have proclaimed my Words to my people
and would have turned them from their evil ways
and from their evil deeds” (23:21,22).***

But the false prophets did not speak the Word of God in truth and purity. They did not condemn the sins of the people. The false prophets themselves continued in unrepentant sin and falsely led the people to think that God was pleased with them even when they continued in impenitence.

The LORD also said,

²⁵ “I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my Name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ ²⁶ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? ²⁷ They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my Name, just as their fathers forgot my Name through Baal worship. ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my Word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the LORD. ²⁹ “Is not my Word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (23:25-29).

“What has straw to do with grain?” One does not feed straw to his livestock. Straw is used for bedding and to collect the manure of the animals in their stalls. Grain is given to livestock to make them strong and grow. So, it is with God’s Word in truth and purity.

God’s Word in truth and purity is like grain – it nourishes and strengthens. But the false prophets’ word was like straw – good only for manure.

The LORD continued,

³⁰ “Therefore,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. ³¹ Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ ³² Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares the LORD. “They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD (23:30-32).

There was no benefit to the people who heard and followed these false prophets. Instead, what was waiting of the people who followed the false prophets was the same destruction and condemnation that awaited the false prophets themselves. They all would be eternally lost. This was the background in which the true Prophet Jeremiah found himself.

So, the LORD said through Jeremiah,

^{23:1} “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 (who shepherd) my people: “Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, behold, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,” declares the LORD (23:1&2).

These false prophets did not take care of the flock. Therefore, the LORD would not take care of them. The false prophets had destroyed, scattered and driven the flock away from the LORD. The LORD would drive the false prophets away from him and away from their security. In the immediate context of these prophecies of Jeremiah, the Babylonians were gathering in strength and would descend on Judah and Jerusalem for destruction. In the long-term, the false prophets would be eternally damned. And not only was this the case for the false prophets.

In the Old Testament, the shepherds of God's people included not just prophets but also priests and kings. During the time of Jeremiah, the priests and kings were also wicked. They too would suffer both temporal and eternal punishment from the LORD, for they had failed in their godly leadership of the people.

APPROPRIATION

What about your pastor – your shepherd – your shepherd under Christ? Has he been faithful? As I examine myself inwardly, I see the many people not visited, the many calls not made, the many straying sheep not gathered, the many possible prospects still alone. Your pastor too is afflicted with the sickness of sin.

You recall also that Old Testament leaders included prophets, priests and kings – civic authorities. Our civic authorities have been rank with the exposure of their sexual misconduct and immorality – yet we elect them! Too many of our civil authorities condone rather than condemn the murder of unborn children, the killing of the elderly, the deprivation of justice to the poor and needy. Too many of our civil authorities have plenty of money, comfortable homes and offices, excellent health care and lack no physical want. Not so the people whom they have been called to govern. Our entire society is sin sick! So are you!

Examine yourself and the authority you have been given. Are you man or woman, child or parent, husband or wife, father or mother? Can any of you brag or boast about having perfectly fulfilled those responsibilities? The same consequence of destruction that faced the leaders and peoples of Jeremiah's time face you and me. There is only hope in the fact that the LORD does still provide faithful shepherds like Jeremiah.

THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK II. BY APPOINTING FAITHFUL SHEPHERDS

From an early age, perhaps in his twenties, the LORD had called Jeremiah. Jeremiah writes,

⁴ *The Word of the LORD came to me, saying,*

**⁵ *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a Prophet to the nations.”***

⁶ “Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone to whom I send you, and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

⁹ Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my Words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (1:4-10).

In no way did Jeremiah feel competent to be a Prophet of the LORD. He was too young. He also was without experience. He was without the requisite forcefulness and charisma for being a leader of people. That did not matter. The LORD chose him from before he was born to be his Prophet.

The LORD put his own Words into the mouth of Jeremiah the Prophet. Jeremiah was to proclaim this Word of God in truth and purity – without addition, without subtraction, without twisting or distorting. So the LORD continued to speak to Jeremiah,

¹⁷ “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. ¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹ They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD (1:17-19).

Jeremiah would be a faithful Prophet of the LORD, but it would not be easy. The false shepherds of the land – the false prophets, priests and kings – would oppose Jeremiah. They would persecute, ignore and ridicule Jeremiah. They would threaten, torture and deprive Jeremiah. But God promised that they would not overcome Jeremiah.

The reason that those who opposed Jeremiah would not be victorious was because the LORD was with Jeremiah and would not forsake him. The LORD would defend and rescue Jeremiah. Thus, in Jeremiah, the LORD would “place (establish, set, appoint) shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified (dismayed), nor will any be missing” (23:4). Jeremiah would join a long line of true Prophets of the LORD. All would be opposed. Some would be banished and exiled. Some would be tortured and tormented. Some would be killed and slaughtered. But God’s Word in truth and purity would be proclaimed, and all his faithful shepherds would be finally rescued and delivered.

APPLICATION

Does God provide faithful shepherds today? How do you know? How can you distinguish between a true prophet – a true leader – and a false leader? God’s Word gives you guidance in this matter.

The LORD said through the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, who proclaimed God's Word in truth and purity a little before the time of Jeremiah – the LORD God said, "To the Law [Instruction] and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, they have no light of dawn" (Isaiah 8:20). St. Paul is telling you the same thing, when he writes in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, "Test everything! Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21,22).

You are here this morning listening to this sermon. How do you know that what I am speaking is the truth? How do you know that I am not a false prophet? "To the Law [Instruction] and to the Testimony!" "Test everything! Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil." How shall you know and test? Compare what you hear with the Word of God. Know your Bibles. Be in God's Word every day, so that you can distinguish between what is good and right and what is wicked and false. Yes, the LORD holds pastors and preachers accountable (cf. Hebrews 13:17a). But their accountability to God does you no good if you are led astray by them. Their accountability to God does you no good if you listen and believe their untrue message. The LORD gives faithful shepherds – pastors and preachers – today. You know them by their message. If their message lines up and coordinates with God's Word, then hold to it. If not, then avoid and separate. Moreover, the central message of the true Prophet of God – the true pastor and preacher – will emphasize the only way that a person can be saved and have eternal salvation.

THE LORD GATHERS HIS FLOCK III. BY PROVIDING RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of the most beautiful passages in the Scriptures is contained in the sermon text for this morning: "This is the Name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness!" (23:6b). The Prophet Jeremiah is speaking about Jesus. It is through Jesus that the LORD gathers his people.

The LORD declares, "I myself will gather the remnant (the leftovers) of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them (banished them, exiled them) and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and (multiply) increase in number" (23:3). The LORD notes that he himself had driven away, banished, exiled, his people. He did this because of their sin and impenitence. Their banishment and exile existed in that they no longer had perfect fellowship with the LORD God. But now the LORD would bring them back. The LORD does this through his Son, Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

In the New Testament Jesus said,

¹⁴ "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my Sheep and my Sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the Sheep. ¹⁶ I have other Sheep that are not of this Sheep Pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my Voice, and there shall be One Flock and One Shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my

Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:14-18).

Notice how Jesus refers to himself as substituting himself for his flock – his believers. Indeed, while Jesus took away the sins of the entire world (cf. John 1:29b,36b; 2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 John 2:1&2), only believers in Jesus would benefit from his saving work. This benefit comes through faith alone in Jesus.

Jesus continued,

²⁷ “My Sheep listen to my Voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are One!” (10:27-30).

The way in which people become Jesus’ sheep and members of his flock is by listening to his voice, his Word. In his Word, Jesus fulfills the Prophecy of Jeremiah:

**⁵ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will raise up to David
a Righteous Branch
(a Branch of Righteousness) –
a King who will reign wisely
and do justice and righteousness in the land.
⁶ In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live (dwell) in safety.
This is the Name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteousness!” (23:5-6).**

Jesus is that “Righteous Branch” of King David’s line. Jesus is David’s Son but also David’s Lord and King (cf. Psalm 110; Matthew 22:44,45; Mark 12:36,37; Luke 20:22-44; Romans 1:1-5).

Jesus’ substitutionary work is for all people and applied to believers by faith. The righteousness, perfection, and holiness which God demands (cf. Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:16), Jesus supplies. St. Paul writes,

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from Law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe (Romans 3:21,22).

This is the righteousness you need! This is the righteousness that has been credited to you.

APPROPRIATION

The LORD's promise through Jeremiah's Prophecy has been fulfilled in you and in every believer in Jesus: "I myself will gather the remnant (the leftovers) of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them (banished them, exiled them) and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and (multiply) increase in number" (23:3). It is through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments (Holy Baptism and Holy Communion) that you have been gathered together into the LORD's flock – that you are part of Jesus' flock. God's anger and punishment against your sin has been executed on Jesus. Jesus' righteousness has been credited to you (cf. Romans 3:21,22; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ Jesus is the LORD your righteousness!

Through God's Word in truth and purity, you have been rightly condemned for your sins. Through God's Word in truth and purity, you have been graciously forgiven for your sins. Through the Good News of Jesus – the Gospel – you have been brought to faith in Jesus, and by that faith, you are saved eternally. Continue in that faith by continuing in God's Word in truth and purity.

CONCLUSION

The LORD God himself gathers his flock of believers through his Word and Sacraments. Thus, you have been brought to faith in Jesus your Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for you; who took back his life for you; and whose righteousness has been credited to you. This Good News or Gospel has brought you to faith in Jesus and will keep you in faith in Jesus for eternal life. Amen.