



Pastor Mark Knappe's Sermon

SERMON – 9TH PENTECOST
JULY 18, 2021

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit+

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! And he had compassion on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

When the prophet Jeremiah steps into onto the Lord's drama of salvation he does so during the reign of King Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah, a very good king, a very fine instrument of God's reign in the left hand kingdom. You may recall from Pastor Nelson's sermons the last couple of weeks describing how the Lord reigns/ rules in two spheres or kingdoms, the heavenly/right hand kingdom and through earthly governments/left hand kingdom.

King Josiah is a fine example of a God-fearing king who served the Lord God of Israel in ways of faithfulness as best as an earthly king can. During his reign the Book of the Law was re- discovered and upon becoming familiar with its contents King Josiah realized how far Judah had strayed from the basic teachings of their Lord. He immediately set in motion reform movements. He tore down the High places of Baal, doing away with all the sites whereby the people were worshiping the false gods of the culture. He called all of Judah back into the rich beauties of the Yahweh God of Israel, the very God who led them across the Jordan into the long promised-Promised land.

Josiah did as well as any earthly king could do. He was for a time a shining example of the Lord ruling through the left hand kingdom, a faithful shepherd-king. And yet as good and faithful and Josiah was, there was one thing all his reforms could not accomplish. The transformation of the heart. He could not tear down and rebuild the hearts his people. To turn their hearts to the Lord, to place their trust completely in the Lord God of Israel and no one else. This is where Jeremiah comes in the iron prophet, the very mouthpiece of God. The shepherd/kings of Judah, have failed the Lord, and thereby stand in judgment.

Woe to you shepherds who destroy the sheep of my pasture! Declares the Lord...you have not attended to them. Behold I will attend to you! (This kind of attention, one should never desire.)

As the Lord's promises are always met, Jerusalem would be sacked by the Babylonians in 587 BC. The false shepherd/kings would be put to death or hauled off into captivity. These governmental disasters do not spring up over night. Jeremiah's prophetic vocation would span some 40 years. 40 years of being the Lord's mouthpiece, 40 years of warning calling the kings to repent, to turn back to the Lord, to seek the mercies of the Lord.

And yet in his own time Jeremiah's ratings in the local opinion polls were always in negative numbers. Other prophets who preached peace, peace, when there was none, were well received, but not Jeremiah. The sharp-edged sword of the Lord's word was much too harsh to receive and take to heart.

When left hand kingdom becomes un-tethered from the right hand kingdom. When earthly rulers rule as if God does not exist, the result is always human carnage. When asked how and why communism was able to wreak such carnage in the Soviet Union, Alexander Solzinitzyn answered simply: *This is what happens when men turn away from God.*

Earthly shepherds who rule as if God does not exist, destroy life in the womb and call it health care. Earthly shepherds who rule as if God does not exist take life at the end and call it mercy. Earthly shepherds who govern only for power and glory, rule as if God does not exist. They will come to know the words that Jeremiah once spoke: **Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Behold I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord.** These false shepherds who exercise authority through earthly

governments foster not life and health and salvation, but their wrongful exercise of authority is always pulling or trying to pull the Lord's people into a culture of death.

We certainly feel the weight of these dark times. They indeed can be very demoralizing as we squabble over skin color, false identities, and just about any item blaring at us on the evening news. Having some company over recently, during the visit one of our guests said to me more than once, *I can't watch any news after six o'clock if I want to sleep!* But then he also added this: *these times are pulling me deeper into the faith, deeper into the Trinity's life.*

Not content to tread water in the culture of death, my friend rightly noted the kingdom of life, which is always bearing witness against the culture of death. Last week Pastor Nelson rightly noted that as Christians we have dual citizenship. We belong at once to this earthly kingdom with all its joys and sorrows, sufferings and salutations. Knowing full well that our true citizenship is in heaven. The Lord has given us the fullness of the kingdom by water and the Word.

And so in the meantime we seek the welfare of the city/place in which the Lord has planted us in the present kingdom. And so we pray, we pray everyday, the church does for this kingdom, for our earthly shepherds, good and evil.

One way the church does this is in the 4th petition of the Our Father. You know it well, **give us this day our daily bread.** Just what is it that we are asking for in this petition? Luther pretty much says that here we are praying for pious and faithful rulers, good government. Especially in the LC, Luther focuses on the need for Christians to pray for good government:

Luther: But this petition is especially directed also against our chief enemy, the devil. For all his thought and desire is to deprive us of all that we have from God or to hinder it. He is not satisfied to obstruct and destroy spiritual government by leading souls astray with his lies, and bringing them under his power. He also prevents and hinders the stability of all government and honorable and peaceful relations on earth. There he causes so much contention, murder, treason, and war...In short he is sorry if anyone has a morsel of bread from God and eats it in peace.

So, my brothers and sisters when we are praying "give us this day our daily bread," we are praying mightily against the devil, against the unrighteous and evil earthly shepherd/kings whose actions and policies destroy and scatter the flock, who foster a culture of death over and against the Gospel of life.

We can pray in such a way for we know that the Lord's promises are rooted in the Truth of His Word, flowing from the One who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Though our friend Jeremiah begins with a solemn curse against those who destroy and scatter the Lord's people. The iron prophet is not without good news: **I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.**

That righteous Branch of David meets us this morning in the Gospel. This shoot from the stump of Jesse has broken into this sin-stained world. He has entered quietly through the back door in Bethlehem, little by little he is beginning to take back what is rightfully His. In Mark's Gospel He has most recently dispatched his small band of followers out into the mission field. There the church begins to push back against the false shepherds. There they begin shine the light of life into the culture of sin and death. In our Gospel this morning the disciples return from their time of Catechism, teaching and preaching and healing. Pulling others into the Trinity's life.

When our Lord invites them into the boat once again—**Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while. For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.**

Taking on the culture of death, treading water daily in such a darkness leaves one weary and rung out. As my friend noted the daily treading water in the culture of death brings on sleepless nights. Come away to a desolate place and rest—says the Good Shepherd—the One True and Perfect Shepherd.

This One True Shepherd, King Jesus has been to the desolate place before, taking on His Enemy, and Ours, -the Father of Lies, the Devil. There in the desolate place emerging victorious in order to move ever forward toward the ultimate victory over the unholy trinity of sin-death and the devil.

To a desolate place our Shepherd King Jesus calls you and me. Calling us to rest, but not just a physical time of ceasing. But here Jesus is really calling you into a life of joy, calls you to enter into the joy of the Master.

The joy of leaving the false shepherds of this world, leaving the false gods of the ego that seeks happiness in the temporal material things of the culture. Come away with Jesus into the joy of life now in this kingdom, and eternally in the perfect presence of the Trinity in the heavenly precincts forever. Come away with Jesus in whose presence the wilderness/the desolate places become green grass, teeming with life. Come away with Jesus who calls you out of treading water in the culture of death, by leading you into the still waters of Holy Baptism. Come away with Jesus, who took just five loaves and 2 fish and created a superabundance, signaling that a new creation is underway.

This same Jesus calls you the baptized to come to His table week after week in the desolate places of your lives, with a little bit of bread and a little sip of wine---he feeds you the fullness of the eternal kingdom. Feeds you in a Feast of Love that will never end. His Cup and his Cup alone is overflowing with goodness and mercy for you his beloved child that you may dwell in the House of the Lord forever. Here is the King you can truly follow. Here is the One True King in whom all things hold together.

He comes to you and for you - the True bread, sent down from heaven.

In the Name of Jesus+