Pentecost 9 Jeremiah 23:1-6
July 25, 2021 252-362-529/365-332

The Lord Tends His Flock
I. He punishes the unfaithful shepherds.
II. He provides faithful shepherds.

Dear Christian friends,

In **last week's OT** reading we heard Amos announce **God's judgment** on the NORTHERN KINGDOM of **Israel**. That **kingdom** was now LONG GONE. The people had refused to repent of their sins and return to the Lord. **As preached** by Amos Israel ended up being conquered by the **Assyrians**. The people went off into exile NEVER TO BE HEARD from again.

These verses take us about **150 years** later and to the southern kingdom of **Judah**. UNFORTUNATELY the people of Judah didn't learn ANY LESSONS from **what had happened** to the kingdom of Israel. NOW **Judah** was about to fall **under God's judgment**. The Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Judah – level Jerusalem – destroy the temple. The people would be hauled off into exile. DARK DAYS were descending.

Those dark days and hard times ALSO FELL on the **faithful few** in Judah. Yet there WAS NO NEED for God's people to despair. God was still in charge – STILL TENDING His flock. **Looking at** these verses we learn that THE LORD TENDS HIS FLOCK 1)by punishing the **unfaithful** shepherds and 2)by providing **faithful** shepherds.

I. By punishing the unfaithful shepherds.

We sang in Psalm 23, ***"the LORD is my Shepherd."*** In the gospel reading we heard, ***"(Jesus') heart went out to (the crowds) because they were like sheep without a shepherd."*** Here we have ***"shepherds – sheep – pasture."*** We still talk that way. The word pastor in **Latin means** shepherd.

A shepherd has TWO BASIC JOBS -1)to feed the flock with **good pasture** and 2)to defend the flock from **thieves** and **predators**. A **good shepherd** doesn't lead his flock to BROWNED OUT pasture or POLLUTED waters. A good shepherd doesn't run away at the **first sign** of danger. A **good** shepherd leads the flock – tends the flock – keeps it **together** and **safe**. The shepherd loves the sheep. The sheep love and TRUST their shepherd. Unfortunately that WASN'T WHAT was happening in Judah. ***"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! declares the LORD. You have scattered My flock. You have driven them away. You have not taken care of them, but I will certainly take care of you."***

WHO were these unfaithful shepherds? They were the kings and **leaders** of the people – the prophets and priests who served in the Lord's temple. HOW had they been unfaithful and ***"destroyed and scattered"*** the Lord's flock? One was by their own personal example of **immorality** and **idolatry**. Listen to these passages. ***"All of them are greedy for gain. From prophets to priests, they all practice deceit. They have treated the wound of My people as if it were nothing serious. They say, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace! They are not ashamed at all! They do not know how to be ashamed."*** Later God says, ***"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They are giving you false hope. They proclaim visions that come from their own hearts and not from …the Lord."*** Yet the people weren't TOTALLY INNOCENT. They WILLINGLY FOLLOWED these **unfaithful** shepherds instead of **fleeing** from them. The people also fell under God's judgment.

God STILL TENDS His flock by punishing **unfaithful** shepherds. While political leaders are NOT TO TEACH God's Word they are responsible **to God** for the EXAMPLE and DIRECTION **they set** for their people. These verses especially apply to leaders WITHIN the church – pastors, teachers, etc. Now we

can point to ALL KINDS of **unfaithful shepherds** out there. But these verses also apply IN HERE to our congregation. I – our teachers – our **Sunday School** teachers – Council members, etc. – ARE RESPONSIBLE **to God** for the way we lead and feed God's people. One day we will ***"have to give an account"*** to God for the way we shepherded you. In the TABLE OF DUTIES in the catechism we have God's description of faithful shepherds – ***"above reproach, self-controlled, not violent, able to teach, gentle, holding firmly"*** to God's Word, etc. Pastors and teachers DO WELL to regularly review their **lives** and **ministries** in the light of that.

But what about PARENTS – aren't they the shepherds of the family? Parents have the GOD-GIVEN **responsibility** for their children's physical AND SPIRITUAL well-being. ***"Fathers,"*** God says, ***"do not exasperate your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*** Parents need to **regularly** CHECK THE EXAMPLE they are setting for their children in the language they use – their church attendance or **lack** of it – with their daily lives and **priorities**. Parents need to MAKE SURE they are giving their children the **example** of a LIFE CENTERING around God and His will. They need to make sure **they** and **their children** are FAITHFULLY hearing and learning God's Word AT HOME and in church. TO DO LESS than that is to be an unfaithful and UNFIT **parent-shepherd**.

Because shepherds and flock were **unfaithful** DARK DAYS were coming on Judah. But God was not writing off His flock. God would tend them…

II. By providing faithful shepherds.

The coming years were going to BE HARD for the **OT believer**. God's promise of a Savior was ALL TIED UP with the **Jews living** in the Promised Land. The temple was a **visible sign** of God dwelling among His people. The sacrifices were **daily reminders** of the Savior **who one day** really would ***"take away the sin of the world."*** But living in exile – with the temple destroyed and **no sacrifices** being offered – it WOULD LOOK **as if** God had taken back His promises. Oh, **God needed** to KNOCK SOME SENSE into His people's **thick heads** and **hard hearts** but God wasn't giving up on them.

"I will gather what is left of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their pastures." After seventy years of exile in Babylon the Jews were **set free**. Many returned to the Promised Land and rebuilt their homes and the temple. And then – ***"when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son"*** to be the Savior of the world.

But this promise is MORE than the **Jews simply returning** to the Promised Land. This is God's promise to GATHER HIS PEOPLE ***"from every nation, tribe, people and language."*** Through faith in Jesus **Jews** and **Gentiles** form the ONE FAMILY of God. Trusting in Jesus we Gentiles ***"are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household."***

"My flock …will be fruitful and multiply." TENDED by the Lord **His flock** continues to grow. We NEED TO SEE that! Through Word and Sacrament God continues to TEND and **grow** His flock. God's ways may not BE VERY IMPRESSIVE but they work!

God still tends His flock BY PROVIDING **faithful** shepherds. ***"I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them."*** Jesus gives to His Church – His people – ***"pastors and teachers, for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ. …Until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man."*** Serving as a SHEPHERD UNDER Christ – being a pastor or teacher – is not just a job. The **ministry** is a DIVINE CALL. **At the present** God has provided our teachers and me to faithfully tend YOU, HIS flock.

FAITHFUL shepherds lead the flock into the ***"green pastures and quiet waters"*** of God's refreshing Word. **Faithful shepherds** FOCUS the flock on their faithful Lord and His faithful Word. Pastors –

teachers – need to **regularly check** – "HOW WELL am I focusing God's people on their Savior?" Parents need to **regularly check** WHAT THEY ARE TEACHING their children about God. **As a parent** am I making sure my children are learning and growing in their **Savior's love**? **As a parent** can my children see the difference JESUS MAKES in my life? **As a parent** do my children see and hear me TREATING our **God-given shepherds** with love and respect?

To comfort His people in the **coming dark days** God REPEATED His promise of the Savior. ***"Listen, the days are coming, …when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, who will reign wisely as king and establish justice and righteousness on earth."*** This promise tells us a lot about our Savior. He is a man – a descendant of David. He is ***"righteous"*** and ***"establishes righteousness."*** Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary Jesus was born without a corrupt, sinful nature. Our ***"righteous"*** Savior went on to live a TOTALLY RIGHTEOUS life – always doing what is right **in God's eyes**. God's commandments make clear that God has a VERY DEFINITE WAY that He expects – ORDERS! – us to live. God will accept NOTHING LESS than a ***"righteous"*** life – a life of **perfect love** and **obedience**. God is not looking for a GOOD TRY from us – **nor** does He accept excuses. ***"The wages of sin is death,"*** God bluntly declares. God's judgment on UNFAITHFUL OT Israel warns us NOT TO MESS AROUND with God.

"This is His name by which He will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness." SAVOR – REJOICE – in that name! Our Savior is none other than ***"the LORD"*** – Jehovah Himself – the eternal Son of God born a Son of David. **In Jesus' perfect life** we have the righteousness to STAND ACCEPTABLE before God. JUST AS those OT sacrifices pictured – the **innocent** Jesus died on the cross - punished IN OUR PLACE - ***"to take away the sin of the world."*** Jesus' sacrificial death has FULLY PAID for **every single one** of our sins. Jesus rose triumphant from the dead that first Easter morning – the PROOF POSITIVE that He is our all-sufficient Savior.

Faithful shepherds keep the flock focused on their FAITHFUL Lord Jesus. **Faithful shepherds** feed the flock with God's PURE GOSPEL in Word and Sacraments. TENDED by **such** shepherds and focused on Jesus – ***"they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing, declares the LORD."*** Trusting in Jesus we ARE SURE of God's forgiveness of **all** our sins. We ARE CONFIDENT in our relationship with God. We KNOW we are going straight to heaven when we die. At peace **with God** we CAN LIVE **in peace**. God loves us. God is with us. God is taking care of us. God is FAITHFUL. God is STILL TENDING His flock – even when the **days are dark**. Amen.

NICENE CREED