

## 7-18-2021 8th Pentecost

Let us begin in the name of God, Abba, Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pour upon us the freedom and joy which you intend, O God, that our lives might be grounded in that grace which has no end., and for which Christ has given his life. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The first lesson [is] from **Jeremiah chapter 23**. [Jer. 23: 1-6]

This is talking about bad shepherds.

*Jeremiah said,*

*'Disaster for the shepherds who lose and scatter the sheep of my pasture, Yahweh has declared. This, therefore, is what the God of Israel says about the shepherds who scatter my people, "You have scattered my flock, you have driven them away, you have not taken care of them. Right, I shall take care of you for your misdeeds, Yahweh declares! 'But the remnant of my flock, I myself shall gather from the countries where I have seen them driven to and bring them back to the fold; they will be fruitful and increase in number. For them I shall raise up shepherds to shepherd them. And pasture them. No fear then, no terror for them. None of that anymore. None shall be lost, Yahweh declares!'*

*Look, the days are coming, Yahweh says,  
when I shall raise an upright Branch for David,  
who will reign as king and be wise,  
doing what is just and righteous in the country.  
In his days Judah will triumph  
and Israel live in safety.  
And this is the name that he will be called,  
Yahweh-is our-Saving-Justice."*

The Word of God.

The second lesson is from **Ephesians, chapter 2**. [Ephesians 2: 11-22]

It's about reconciliation.

*Do not forget, there was a time when you were gentiles by physical descent, termed the uncircumcised by those who speak of themselves as circumcised by reason of a physical operation. Do not forget, I say, that you were at that time separate from Christ, and excluded from membership of Israel. You were aliens with no part in the Covenant. You were limited to this world without hope and without God. But now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far off have been brought close by the compassion of Christ. For Christ is the peace between us, and, has made the two peoples into one entity and broken down the barriers which used to keep us apart, by destroying in Christ's own person the hostility between us, that is the Law and the Commandments with their decrees. Christ's purpose in this was, by restoring peace to create a*

*single New Humanity out of the two, and through the cross, to reconcile them both to God as one Body; in his own person, in his own person Christ killed the hostility between us. He came to bring the good news of peace to those who are in far off lands and peace to those who are near. Through him, then, we are now one Spirit with free access to God. You too, my friends, you too are being built up into a dwelling place of God's own Spirit.*

[Peace Singers sing Alleluia]

And from **Mark, chapter 6**, our gospel for today. [Mark 6: 30-34]

*The disciples, who had been on their first missionary journey, returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. Jesus said to them, 'Come away now to some lonely place where we can be by ourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many people coming and going that there was no time for them to be at peace. So, with Jesus, they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going across the lake, many recognized Jesus, and from every town, they hurried to the place on foot and reached that shore before Jesus and the disciples did. So as he stepped on the shore, he saw a large crowd. And Jesus had pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he taught them at some length.*

The word of God. Praise to you, O Christ.

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In the name of God, Abba, Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I am mindful, with this text, of hearing the story of one of my grandfathers (both were Lutheran clergy as well), who on his death bed, Grandpa John just said, "Have pity on the people. Have pity on the people!"

The reality for Jeremiah, [who] feeling the agony of bad shepherds, irresponsible leaders, made clear that two realms exist before God, two realms of great contrast. On the one hand, they were evil days in which Jeremiah lived--like the present--filled with deceit and treachery. And often leaders are chiefly to blame. They offer nothing.

And one thinks of the center, which I mentioned in Yeats' poem last week. The center that is dissolving and cannot hold. Maybe these are those kinds of times too. And in Jeremiah's day, kings follow kings from bad to worse. One ruler, evil or stupid or violent or the combination as may be, simply breeds another one.

The leaders, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, have become 'misleaders'. And in consequence, people are scattered, divided, confused in mind, victimized by false promises, and told to be satisfied with bread and circuses in the Roman's day. Maybe we should simply be entertained by Internet and pizza! *What more do you want out of life? Google it. That's all you need.*

And the led become misled. The situation sometimes feels circular and closed in. The society is ill. We all know that the illness is itself victimizer and victim heaped up against each other--told there can be no healing, conventional remedies simply won't work anymore--especially when people don't want to stomach the truth.

Jeremiah makes clear in his time--prosperity for the 1%, misery for the multitudes. And yet his message to us today is hope against hope. God has not abandoned us. God is in our presence, and will by means extraordinary and unfathomable, lead us to a new life. Hope, friends, against hope. Faithful people, the first call is to reject being mute, passive, and resigned. That will get us nowhere.

The one who is to come is already present among us. The Savior whom we anticipate always leads people out of slavery. That's God's reputation, moving us from slavery into a new and Promised Land. Dead-ends can become doorways. The New Creation is crying out to be born. Will we participate?

So this Good Shepherd, Jesus, doesn't reject those in need, though he's overwhelmed, exhausted. But he has pity on them. He empathizes. No hardness of heart here. None. Room always to breathe, to change, to heal and make whole.

Well, in this remarkable passage from Ephesians we get to hear the core of the Gospel, today. 'You, my friends, remember, now remember, you were aliens. You were outsiders, with no hope of Covenant blessings. But now you have been brought close to God.'

That is the gospel, always bringing us closer and closer to God, and each other. Even with our enemies, bring them closer. The mercies of Christ, you see, the one who is our peace, the one who brings us closer, and overcomes what has been divided and broken, this Christ makes us whole and makes us into a *New Humanity*, a single being, through the cross, reconciling us into God, and with one another, by destroying the hostility among us in his own person. That is the mystery of the faith--destroying the hostility that breaks apart, divides, antagonizes us inside of our own families, with people we don't like--destroying the hostility in his own person.

There's nothing you have to do; nothing you have to improve. This gift is freely offered, that the healing possibility exists and is given to all. Exercising it is our calling, and the demand before us. He has destroyed the hostility in his own person, not taking it out on us, not desiring that we accomplish some great feat of overwhelming love, which we may not want to do. It has been destroyed in his own person; it destroyed him.

On Easter we sing this ancient troparion:

*Christ is risen from the dead,  
trampling down death by death.  
And upon those in the tombs bestowing life,*

*Trampling down death by death.*

It killed him and still death doesn't have the final word.

The challenges before us in these days, the challenges are daunting, but raising life from the dead should give us the confidence and assurance that all can be made new. This banner of reconciliation hangs above the congregation, and is the final reminder, each week. when worship concludes, that the benediction of life is Christ, reconciling us one to another--the mystery beyond all mysteries. Let us like Jeremiah, hope against hope. Amen.

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O God, into the midst of pains, which are too deep to name, inside the darkness we all taste and despise, within the hurts of our hearts in the rejections we have experienced, we ask you to be God, the life-giver, the resurrecting one who breathes eternally the hope of healing and transformation, that we might be raised up from all those dead places within our lives, that we might enjoy and share in the communion of life with all other beings and creatures, that we might live our days in the praise of your dying and undying love for us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Glory be to God, Abba, Imma, Son and Holy Spirit, and upon us weak and wounded people, upon us beautiful and amazing creatures, may mercy and compassion be shed in both worlds, now and forever. Amen.