

Who Are WE – With a King?
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Christ the King Sunday
November 24, 2019
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC

Jeremiah 23:1-6 The Message Translation

An Authentic David-Branch

23 ¹⁻⁴ “Doom to the shepherd-leaders who butcher and scatter my sheep!” God’s Decree. “So here is what I, God, Israel’s God, say to the shepherd-leaders who misled my people: ‘You’ve scattered my sheep. You’ve driven them off. You haven’t kept your eye on them. Well, let me tell you, I’m keeping my eye on *you*, keeping track of your criminal behavior. I’ll take over and gather what’s left of my sheep, gather them in from all the lands where I’ve driven them. I’ll bring them back where they belong, and they’ll recover and flourish. I’ll set shepherd-leaders over them who will take good care of them. They won’t live in fear or panic anymore. All the lost sheep rounded up!’ God’s Decree.”

⁵⁻⁶ “Time’s coming” — God’s Decree—

“when I’ll establish a truly righteous David-Branch,
A ruler who knows how to rule justly.

He’ll make sure of justice and keep people united.

In his time Judah will be secure again
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name they’ll give him:

‘God-Who-Puts-Everything-Right.’

In just a few weeks we’ll be singing

“This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing”

This Thursday is Thanksgiving and before most of our turkey has digested the shopping frenzy will have begun.

I find that unsettling.

Not only is it contrary to the prayer that Virginia brings regularly – that we pray for people who aren’t able to worship because they have to work...we can pray THIS week for folks who have to work instead of being with their families.

Shucks, aren’t we supposed to be giving thanks on Thanksgiving?
Can’t Christmas shopping wait for, AT LEAST, one more day?

And it’s not only shopping “opportunities” that have become intrusive.

My car radio has been offering “holiday” music for weeks!
The songs are becoming “politically correct” and are about Santa and Frosty.
And some, yes, SOME, will be referring to a King who was born in a stable.

So what does that mean?

What does it mean FOR US that Jesus Christ is King and how will we live our lives with HIM as the Ruler of our lives?

In today’s reading, from Jeremiah 23, I was a little “puzzled” that the prophet wrote “shepherd” INSTEAD of “king.”

But, that’s because I hadn’t done my back-study...that tells us that in that time, Judea’s kings called themselves “shepherds” – trying to present themselves as *protectors* of their people.

However, during Jeremiah’s time, the kings weren’t doing such a great job of shepherding. Jeremiah had to do **his** job during a difficult time in Israel.

He has to name FIVE kings who he sees as directly responsible for the downfall of the nation and that their greed led them away from the real definition of serving the people...especially the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

Sounds like a great time and place, huh?
God’s “sheep” have been scattered.

And then, it is promised, in verse 5, that God will “raise up a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right...”

Praise God, the *real* Shepherd will come and be trustworthy. He will save the people.

He will be called “Our Lord, Our Righteousness.”

This King, that Jeremiah wrote about is, of course, Jesus Christ.

We, post-Resurrection people, know that Jesus, Our King isn’t a military force.
Jesus, Our King, isn’t arrogant or greedy.

Jesus, OUR King, hangs out with poor and marginalized people.

And Our King, hung ON a cross for us, with God's love to save our broken world.

[Sing] "This, this is Christ the King...."

We, Dear Ones, are the sheep who follow the Shepherd.

And as the sheep, we are to live our lives as models, with our actions AND attitudes (even our thoughts) after His.

It is not easy.

The world is racked with war and famine and poverty...

...and people being judgmental – YOU fill in the blanks of opportunity for those things.

Can you image what Jeremiah would write about *these days*?

Sadly, one thing he'd probably (oh) mention is how few people come to church regularly. Doesn't have to be here – though that would be nice.

I saw a Facebook "funny" that said something like "It's hard for a pastor to follow Jesus' instruction to "feed my sheep" when the sheep won't come to church.

Lot's of folks can be polled and say they are Christians.

They may even say they have a "home church" but they don't attend there regularly. Some haven't come for years.

It's a crisis of ministry frankly. We have to wonder, "how do these people model their lives after the King without community to worship, study, pray, and serve?"

When Gordon and Shirley were received into our Family of Faith earlier WE ALL responded with our support of them with the words: "*We renew our vows to uphold PPUMC with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness.*"

Those aren't just blah, blah, blah words!

No!

We're here to bring God glory!

To follow Christ the King!

Amen?

We're to be the sheep of God's pasture – and that pasture is God's church!

Now, I know, especially as we get more information about the United Methodist General Conference coming next year, that God's pasture, the church is f-a-r from perfect.

That's because it's made up of US – sinful humans.

But, if we truly are the faithful sheep, and part of the church of Jesus Christ, then we are seeking to be faithful disciples of the ONE, the True King.

We strive to love and forgive each other as faulty folks who are following the One who is Perfect.

In Scripture we have examples of the early Church. It was a community of folks who were intimately involved with one another. They ate together and prayed together. They worshiped and learned AND grew together. Those early Christians stuck together!

Jeremiah lived about 600 years BEFORE Jesus was born and the early church was. Seems like what he wrote about then isn't terribly different than today.

Sheep are scattered (we should invite them to be here!)

People are hungry for attention, food and clothing, a good job.

They're afraid.

And because of this, a lot of good WHICH COULD BE GETTING DONE – isn't.

Let's look at it this way:

Do you recall, as your kids grew up – or as you watch your grandies grow up (way too fast) when they tried out for a team sport?

You may have taught them the fundamentals, played a few casual games with other kids in the 'hood.

You shared the skills and confidence to go to the team try-outs.
May have been hours! May be involved tears of frustration.

And then they are good enough to make the team!

And their practices started.

Coaching helped and they learned more and more about the game.

One thing they learned on that team was that it was NOT about one person.

The ol' "No I in team" rule.

It's about making sure the team is the best it can be. Not a single person but all the members making unselfish plays, sacrificing and good leadership.

Yeah, your kid or grandie made the team but, without the coach and the rest of the team – what *are they?*

They'd be a bunch of kids playing alone in the backyard – and that wouldn't accomplish much.

But, with good coaching something happens...a chemistry of teamwork happens and the Team CAN meet their goals, win games...do great things!

It's the same for us.

Without God's church, we're just a bunch of folks, **saying** we're Christians, wandering around...by ourselves.

We wouldn't learn the fundamentals – like worshiping with others of God's sheep.

Or learn about Jesus and how his example is OURS to work in each other's lives.

We wouldn't do *outreach* with others in the 'hood and beyond.

We'd struggle to get anything done- EVEN USING our God-given talents and gifts in God's Kingdom.

And EXCEPT when we're in trouble or danger or need – we probably wouldn't be thinking much about Jesus.

Not only do we NEED the church...to practice those fundamentals and live out our faith and grow as God's people...

...the Church needs us.

Go back to my team sport idea.

During a game, yes the players are doing their thing...

...but there are also players on the bench who are watching and cheering and are available to go into the game.

They're not "just" sitting there – they're watching and learning so that they can be the best when they are out there playing.

The "JV squad" is being prepared to be called up for the "big game."

And if the team is going to have a future, there have to be those bench-sitters preparing to take the lead when they are needed.

Oh, and don't forget the ball-girls, the water-boys, the folks who clean the uniforms and raise money for the team.

ALL OF THEM have an important role.

And if someone *isn't* doing their part; if they're missing from the game or from practice; or the uniforms stink – *everyone* suffers!

When people aren't part of a church, THE CHURCH SUFFERS.

When someone decides to skip a week and "sit this one out" – things get stalled. The Church of Christ is weakened.

We can't deny that the world is a mess and we're all losing. Maybe not literally because golly, Dear Ones, we are SO blessed.

But, the headlines about the homeless and homicides...somehow, parts of the team aren't "building chemistry" – right? Too many "I's" – not enough team.

So here comes my favorite phrase:

BUT GOD!

But God hasn't given up on us.

God knows the "sheep" are scattered and OUT OF GOD'S GREAT LOVE for us, God sent Jesus to be our leader, our Savior, and our King.

Jesus is the one who first taught us how to treat one another. Yeah, Grandma's coaxing didn't hurt, but Jesus reached out with love and concern.

He sat in synagogue with people who were friends and family, but also with those nasty Samaritans. He brought together people that too often have racist slurs slung at them – and he called them Church.

Paul said it best in his letter to the Galatians (3:28)

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

So, here we are, approaching Thanksgiving, then Advent, and Christmas when we're *supposed* to celebrate the birth of OUR KING. Can we repeat Paul's idea? That we're ALL one in Christ Jesus?

When Jeremiah wrote our Scripture passage for today, he wrote that there IS a good promise from God that comes in the midst of a bad situation.

We've messed things up BUT GOD is still able and willing to fix the situation – if we'll pay attention. If we'll practice Our King's example.

There is hope and assurance – no matter how bleak things may seem.

Jeremiah spoke powerfully about what God would do in the future AND about what God is doing right here and right now through those who will be the sheep of God's pasture.

There are great possibilities for our lives and for the life of our community, this little church and God's Church worldwide.

As we allow Christ our King to bring us together and lead us how will being his subjects expand how he IS the King of our hearts, our lives, our time, our talents, our gifts, our service and our witness?

Will we live together in the great commandments to love for God and neighbor?

Will we work together in mission as the Church of Christ the King?

If so, we will grow closer to one another and accomplish great things.

If not, we all will lose – not just those outside the Church – all of us.

Celebrate being a sheep in the Kingdom of Christ the King!

Celebrate the Shepherd sent to guide the flock in God's pasture.

God's Word, though written by an ancient prophet, is for right now.

Today and our future belongs to the King – *“whom shepherds guard and angels sing.”*

Praise God that Our King lives!

Amen.