

November 24, 2019
New Song Episcopal Church
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(All lectionary passages are included below the sermon text.)

Waiting for Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23 speaks to me today. From my experiences, it could be talking to specific churches and denominations.

This include groups that are quite large in numbers right now, but which harbor an attitude of exclusivity.

This attitude that shuns people who don't fit a rigid definition of who can follow Jesus and who cannot is *antithetical* to the actual Gospel.

Hard and pointed words. "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away...so I will attend to you for your evil doings..."

I'm so thankful that isn't the end of the message! It is just the beginning, and an appropriate beginning considering the problem.

Once the problem is honestly and directly addressed, then we get to God's solution. That's where we should place our ultimate focus, but only after being honest about the failures.

The Jeremiad continues with "I myself will gather the remnant...I will raise up shepherds who will shepherd them...they will not fear any longer...nor shall any be missing."

Then, the really good part comes.

Surely the days are coming when the Lord will raise up for David a righteous Branch. His Advent is coming soon!

Today's Psalm reminds us that God is our refuge and strength. That we need not fear the darkness that surrounds us. That help will arrive at "the break of day."

The passage from Paul's Epistle to the Colossians builds Christ up as one of glory, power, redemption, forgiveness, fullness, peace, and reconciliation. WOW!

This sounds like what we all want. What we need. What our hearts long and cry out to receive. It sounds like the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophetic promise. How amazing! How wonderful!

It reminds me of something the beloved children's television show writer, producer, host, and Presbyterian minister Mr. Rogers said.

"When we love a person, we accept him or her exactly as is: the lovely with the unlovely, the strong along with the fearful, the true mixed in with the façade, and of course, the only way we can do it is by accepting ourselves that way." — From The World According To Mister Rogers

Then, in Luke's Gospel, we kill Jesus. We crucify the promise, the promised one. It seems like maybe the sinister antagonists from Jeremiah's time (and ours) have won.

We are back to darkness. At least it seems so.

In the middle of his passion, during the most painful and heartbreaking moments, Jesus demonstrates to us God's ultimate attitude.

They were gambling to determine who would get to keep Jesus's clothes.

Jesus was saying, "Father forgive them."

They mocked him.

He endured.

They surrounded Jesus with criminals as all three were hanged on crosses to die in public shame. One of them derided him further as they all suffered the same punishment. The other asked for forgiveness.

"Remember me when you come into your kingdom."

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The darkness is not the end. The darkness is temporary. Hope endures. Hope is where we are now. Hope is the season we are entering.

We are all waiting for the fulfillment of the gracious and hopeful words that were spoken.

We are waiting for the fall of the oppressor. We are waiting for justice. We are waiting for the evil deeds to be avenged and those driven away to be gathered.

We wait, sometimes forgetting that we are the ones called to do the work.

Amen.

The Old Testament: Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

The Psalm: Psalm 46

Deus noster refugium

1 God is our refuge and strength, *
a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, *
and though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea;

3 Though its waters rage and foam, *
and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.

4 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

5 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, *
the holy habitation of the Most High.

6 God is in the midst of her;
she shall not be overthrown; *
God shall help her at the break of day.

7 The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are shaken; *
God has spoken, and the earth shall melt away.

8 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

9 Come now and look upon the works of the LORD, *
what awesome things he has done on earth.

10 It is he who makes war to cease in all the world; *
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire.

11 "Be still, then, and know that I am God; *
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth."

12 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

The Epistle: Colossians 1:11-20

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The Gospel: Luke 23:33-43

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. The people stood by, watching Jesus on the cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."