

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
November 24, 2013**

"Christ the King Sunday"

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Thank God for Christ, Our Shepherd-King!

- 1. Immediate fulfillment from the LORD**
- 2. Complete fulfillment from the LORD**

Hymns: 579 – 360 – 727

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Jeremiah 23:1-6 –

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD. "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

What kind of king would you like? Imagine for a moment that you had been born into a place and time where a king ruled over the land. What would you like to see in your king?

This certainly would be important to you, for a king's reign is not limited. He will be king until the end of his life, and he will have absolute power to rule however he wishes. What kind of king would you like?

I'd imagine that you would hope that the king would be wise. Also, that he would be one who knows and loves his people. And that he would rule with their best interests in mind. After all, we probably all know from history that some kings have not cared for their people and ruled them in this way. You would hope he would protect his people when danger lurked. You would hope that he would not be one to impulsively and selfishly act, but that he would be wise and that his actions would be well thought out. We would say, "That's my kind of king!" You probably would not even have a problem with such a king having complete power and control over the country.

If this is the type of king that you'd want, I have good news for you today. On this last Sunday of the church year, the focus of our service is where it belongs, on Christ, the King of heaven. What kind of King is he? We will explore that thought from the book of Jeremiah, during a time in Israel's history that was rather distressing. The Lord speaks about the kings that they have had and has promises for his people. As we read these verses, we will see:

- 1. Immediate fulfillments that the Lord would bring about**
- 2. Complete fulfillment that he would carry out**

1. Immediate fulfillment from the LORD

The Lord said through Jeremiah, *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the LORD.*

You need to know the background to these verses to understand what was happening. First of all, you need to understand the emphasis of the word “shepherding.” This Hebrew verb is the primary term for feeding domesticated animals. It includes providing for all the needs of such animals, many times involving sheep. This is the picture that God used for the spiritual leaders of his nation, especially the kings. When David had been young, the Lord said to him, “*you will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler*” (2 Samuel 5:2). Leading God’s nation meant “shepherding” them in love!

However, in these verses God condemns his Old Testament shepherd-kings and spiritual leaders. Who were these bad shepherds? They were kings with names like Ahab, Ahaz, and Manasseh. They pretended to worship the Lord and even offered sacrifices to the true God at times, but then they also worshiped false gods and idols. Many of these other gods came from the nations around them and involved sexual immorality in their worship. Some even supposedly were pleased with human sacrifice, causing the king to sacrifice his own children to these gods. These bad shepherds were also priests who watched the people come to worship the Lord in the temple in the morning, but never stopped them from climbing up to the high places and going to the groves in the evening to offer their other worship under the stars and moon. They were priests and prophets who delivered false messages of peace out of their own imaginations, when the Lord said judgment was coming upon the nation. They were prophets who told people what they wanted to hear, in spite of the message being false. **These shepherds had served to “scatter” the people spiritually and also physically in exile.**

Therefore, God has words for them that will be fulfilled in the near future. Punishment for them was coming! The wordplay the Lord uses is clear. Our reading said, “Because you have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you.” Those two verbs are the same word in Hebrew, meaning to “attend to.”

The Lord is saying, “Because you have not attended to my flock, I will attend to you!” Those ominous words of God were not an idle threat. We read about the demise of many of these bad shepherds in the Old Testament:

- King Ahab, who was shot by an arrow in battle and bled and died that day. Dogs licked up his blood, as God had prophesied.
- His wife, Queen Jezebel, who was thrown from an upper window and died.
- And Zedekiah, the king at the time of Jeremiah, would be the last king before the exile of God’s people to Babylon. The end of Zedekiah in Jeremiah 39 is almost too grisly to mention.

God’s judgment on these bad shepherds would be certain.

Another immediate promise would be fulfilled: “*I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.*” The Lord says that he will gather them himself again. We certainly see a fulfillment in the return from exile that God would bring about. His people would be exiled in the country of Babylon after the time of King Zedekiah, but the Lord brought them back after 70 years in exile there. **He would not desert his people, despite the evil that the bad shepherds had brought upon his people!**

We see a third prediction from the Lord: “*I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing,*” declares the LORD. The Lord promises new shepherds over them who will shepherd them faithfully. Who were these shepherds? There are many that we can identify:

- Zerubbabel, who led the first wave of exiles back to the Promised Land from Babylon and rebuilt the Lord’s altar and the Temple. He became the new governor in Israel.
- Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the leader, who joined to lead more waves

of returning exiles. Nehemiah led the charge in rebuilding Jerusalem's city wall. Ezra led a spiritual renewal as the Law of Moses was read again.

- Three faithful post-exilic prophets whose prophecy would be included in the books of Scripture: Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi.
- John the Baptist, whose coming as the Forerunner of Christ we will soon hear about in Advent.
- The apostles, who would lead the Church after the time of Jesus Christ.

God brought about many immediate fulfillments in the time following Jeremiah's words that were very comforting to God's sheep, who were scattered and harassed.

2. Complete fulfillment from the LORD

Yet there is more. Can you sense that there is more? The later fulfillments and the complete fulfillment of Jeremiah's words is something we must learn and will strike us very close to home.

The Lord also said through Jeremiah, *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."*

We have the specific promise of a certain Shepherd-King that the Lord would send, who would do marvelous things. This is a Messianic promise of the Savior himself, the Servant of the Lord, the Son of God. This is Jesus Christ that these verses are predicting, in which the complete fulfillment of God's Word would take place.

We see a summary of what he will do in the name that God gives to him: The LORD our Righteousness. Why would this name be the perfect name for the great Shepherd-King that God would send? A few reasons:

1. Jesus, as "The Lord our Righteousness" would be perfect and righteous in every

way. He had no sin. Once, when Jesus was under attack from his enemies, said to them in John 8, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* None could. He had been holy and perfect in every way from the time he obeyed his parents perfectly until then.

2. A way that this would be proven would be by a second angle that we see in Jesus. He would "be wise." Many things are implied in the meaning of that Hebrew word. The obvious meaning is one of insight, knowledge, and understanding. An added thought is that of someone who teaches wisdom. He tells others what is true and right. We certainly see fulfillment of this in Christ. And another added meaning is that such a person does what is right and he prospers. We certainly think of Jesus, who perfectly fulfilled his Father's will and in the end has been glorified as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. This is in direct opposition to the bad shepherds of Jeremiah's day, of whom Jeremiah wrote in chapter 10: *"The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered."*
3. Another aspect of "The Lord our Righteousness" is in the word "our." He is our righteousness before God. The Messiah who was to come would be our holiness and righteousness. This is important because to enter heaven, you must, *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."* That has never changed. To enter heaven, you must be perfect. Are you perfect? If you were to arrive at the gate of heaven after this life and God were to ask you, "Have you been perfect?" what would you answer? You would answer "Yes." Yes, you have been perfect because Jesus Christ has been your righteousness. The holy life he lived, he lived for you as your substitute. The death he died on

the cross was for your sin, guilt, and shame. He has given you your righteousness. The Apostle Paul would later write in the New Testament book of 2 Corinthians, *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

4. His righteousness would not end with his service to us as our Savior. As Shepherd-King, he still is active today. Scripture tells us that he rules the world for the benefit of his Church. Jesus himself told his followers that he would continue to gather his people until the end of time. The Lord Jesus still is ruling this world and is gathering his people!
5. One day, he will return to judge. In this season of the church year called “End Times” we focus on many of the words of the Bible that talk about the end of the world, heaven, and hell. Be certain of this: He will come again to judge the world and to be King of heaven eternally.

As if this weren't enough, one final, reassuring promise remains for us to marvel at. The Shepherd-King, the “Lord our Righteousness,” continues to send shepherds for his people. The Lord still sends faithful public ministers for his flock.

Why would he do this? Why is this still necessary in the end times in which we live? To put it bluntly, it's because of you. It's because of the sinful nature inside of sinful mortals that causes believers to become straying sheep. Have you ever seen this in your own life? Sheep stray. Sheep wander. Sheep need the guidance of a daily shepherd. Therefore, God has seen fit to shepherd his people with called workers for centuries. Even when he led his people in a very visible way when they came out of Egypt's slavery, he led them through the faithful ministry of Moses and Aaron.

As one WELS member put it to me once, “We are all going to need a pastor someday.” What he meant was that at the end when the doctors call and a person is passing through the

valley of the shadow of death into eternity, they need a shepherd to minister to them by sharing the Word with them and by praying with them. But even before that time, you benefit through the ministry and guidance of faithful pastors. You certainly have access to the Word of God and the sacraments on your own, yet the ministry of and relationship with a faithful pastor is for your benefit. Your shepherds can prepare a weekly message for your faith. Your shepherds can give you the Lord's Supper and baptize your children. Your shepherds can counsel you when troubles come. Your shepherds can also correct you in your sinful ways and mistakes and lead you back to the right path. The word “pastor” means “shepherd,” and through the faithful pastors you have known, know now, and will know, the Good Shepherd-King will guide you faithfully to your home in heaven that he has prepared for you.

Is this your kind of King? The kind who is wise? The kind who loves his people and does not impetuously and selfishly serve only his own whims and interest?

Praise God for the Shepherd-King that we have seen today! The Lord brought about many immediate results from the words of Jeremiah in our reading, and he has brought about – and will bring about – complete fulfillment of these words in the King of heaven, Jesus Christ, “the Lord our Righteousness.” As we close the church year today on Christ the King Sunday, thank God for Christ, the Shepherd-King! Amen.