

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2015

Jeremiah 23:1-6

God Calls New Shepherds Who will Care for His People

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Dear Friends in Christ,

My great-aunt was a surrogate grandma to me and my siblings. She and my great-uncle lived in Amish country in Pennsylvania. Behind their house, across an alley was a sale barn for weekly auctions of animals. Two of my cousins and I would help load and unload the animals and take them from truck to stall. Sometimes, we used wood handles with leather straps attached to move the pigs, cows, and sheep along. Once, when Nini saw those in the back pockets of our jeans, she yelled at us for abusing the animals.

The LORD used the picture of animal abuse to describe the way the wicked leaders in Israel treated his people. As a result, the people turned away from the LORD and God's judgment came down on them. In his mercy, the LORD God spared a remnant of believers and promised to gather them together and place new shepherds over them. There would be an outstanding one in particular. His name is "The LORD Our Righteous Savior." This takes place in the establishment of God's kingdom in the New Testament church.

God Calls New Shepherds Who will Care for His People. God punishes the unrighteousness. God causes his flock to prosper. The righteous Branch provides righteousness for his own.

The leaders in Judah were false shepherds who abused God's flock, his people. They abused them by worshipping false gods. They taught their lies as the truth and many believed them. This led to spiritual adultery, immorality, and injustice in the nation.

God used the Babylonians as his instrument of judgment. The LORD God punished the nation and its false shepherds. God punishes unrighteousness. For a time God will permit those who oppose him and his Word to prosper, but in his time he will expose them.

The false shepherds reap the results of their rebellion against God's Word. They cause their downfall. "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for all the evil you have done." God did not do anything to them they did not bring about by their unrighteousness. In the Old Testament church, the two great kingdoms brought ruin on themselves because of their unfaithfulness.

On this Orthodox Sunday, we thank God for keeping our fathers and us faithful to the Word. We pray for our fellow believers being abused by false shepherds that they do not believe their lies and fall away from the truth, especially the new covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. We pray that God would lead those false shepherds into the truth and know he will finally judge their unrighteousness if they don't.

We exist and are able to offer those prayers because of the second part of Jeremiah's prophecy. God causes his flock to prosper.

The LORD God preserved for himself a remnant of believers in spite of the false shepherds. These believers clung to the promise God had given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They believed the promise of the Savior as did their father, David. For another four centuries, the Old Testament church would live under the heavy hand of heathen nations. Still, the church continued to exist.

God gathered his believers from those nations and brought them back to the good pasturage of love and truth. We think of the apostles and then the orthodox church fathers. We think of all the

reformers before Luther, during his time, and after his death. How blessed we are for those pastors and professors who have fought for the truth in our church body over the years, and continue to do so.

These all are among the ones God was speaking about when he said, “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 God declared the coming day of the New Testament kingdom of God that would grow and prosper. We have seen over the centuries a continued rebellion against the Word within the visible manifestations of the church, yet love and truth continue in many churches around the globe. They preach Jesus Christ, crucified and risen again for the forgiveness of all our sins. God continues to provide shepherds for his people “who will tend them, and they no longer will be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing.”

The fact that the Lord added daily to the church those who are being saved did not stop after Pentecost. It did not stop because of the third thing we see. The Righteous Branch provides a righteousness of his own.

The entire existence and prosperity of the church lies in “David’s righteous Branch.” He is not just another branch of David’s family tree. He is a new tree from the same root. He is in himself righteous, without sin. Because of that righteousness he could come and obey the Law perfectly and bear our sin as our Substitute. That righteous Branch is Jesus Christ, our Savior.

This is the name “by which he will be called, the LORD our Righteous Savior,” literally, the LORD Our Righteousness. He will be our righteousness as God the Father imputes to us his holiness under the Law, and as his suffering the price of sin is our own. He will be the perfect King who will exercise his rule with the ability to be our King. As the King rules in this manner, his subjects in his kingdom benefit greatly.

That King will do, establish and execute, what is just and right. This is what is just and right; “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” [Mk16:16]

The Righteous Branch has every quality in divine nature and in his redemptive actions that procures for us and for the entire world the righteousness before God that is retroactive and timeless. It is retroactive for all those who believed the promise in spite of false shepherds before he came, and timeless for those who will believe through faithful shepherds in the future.

The LORD God will not tolerate shepherds who abuse the flock. Under the watchfulness of faithful shepherds, God’s flock benefits and grows. David’s righteous Branch provides righteousness for his own. This is orthodoxy. This is straight teaching. Amen. <SDG>