

IN NOMINE JESU

WARNING AND PROMISE

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

*"In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, 'YHWH our Righteousness.'"*¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our Old Testament reading for today was declared first to the faithful among a people who claimed to followed God, as they were experiencing evil in their land and facing certain national tragedies. When the people in the 20th century AD assembled the readings for this day, they surely were not given the gift of immediate prophecy to know that today we would hear them in a land faced with great evil, and confronting many apparently certain national tragedies. They could not have humanly known, nor did they write anywhere that God had told them, that fourteen states in our country would have an unemployment rate over 10%, including one state with a rate over 15%; wars in two lands; trillions of dollars in national debt being added to daily; and a continuing decline in the number of those in America who call themselves Christians and attend the Lord's Service on a regular basis.

Yet, the reality that evil still exists in the world, the truth that human nature is still corrupted by the Fall of Adam, and that sin brings punishment, the producers of our day's reading selection did know. They could have been certain that this ancient reading from the lips of Jeremiah against the rulers of Judah and Israel, would be still needed, both for its warning:

“Woe to shepherds who are destroying and causing to scatter the sheep from My pasture,” declares YHWH...²

and its Promise:

“In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, ‘YHWH our Righteousness.’”³

In those two phrases, we have warning and promise, what you have learned to call Law and Gospel. The Law from this text is the convicting, killing, and condemning use of the Law of God. The harsh words of our text are declared to break those who look to human leaders for salvation, to warn them of their impending doom, and to prepare them for the Promise that brings hope, forgiveness and life.

The Law of this text, at first, seems to be focused only on the leaders of God’s people – the kings, priests and Levites of old. After all, it begins with a “woe,” a word used by God through the prophets to announce an oracle of judgment. Hear it again:

“Woe to shepherds who are destroying and causing to scatter the sheep from My pasture,” declares YHWH...⁴

Even the newest Christian can grasp that God is speaking judgment against those whom He has appointed to lead His people. We are familiar with God’s use of the shepherd image for not only pastors, but also kings and priests of God’s earthly kingdom. We understand that God calls leaders – human governments – to account, not just on the Last Day, but in time. No human kingdom lasts forever. They all are brought down – and this is the core reason – on account of sin.

¹ Jeremiah 23:6

² Jeremiah 23:1.

³ Jeremiah 23:6

For the faithful, it is dismaying to live during the time of a nation's downfall. It is easy to fall into temptation that blames leaders past and present for the calamities, wars, economic chaos and ruin that come upon a people. It is fallen human nature to blame one's problems on others, to complain about our leaders, their decisions, and their moral failings.

No one truly wants to look at his or own personal culpability in times of national tribulation. This is why God places His condemnation through Jeremiah upon the shepherds of His people, and also shows it to be His will for the people's sins also. In the same text we have heard today, God says,

"And I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the nations to which I caused to drive them, and I will cause to bring back them upon their fold, and fruitful they will be, and multiply."⁵

From the words, "which I cause to drive them," the faithful hear that God has used evil shepherds – the rulers of the lands where His people once dwelt (and even now live) – to punish evil people. When a land falls on account of sin, all sin needs to be taken into account. That includes that of the true faithful – yours and mine.

If that pinches your conscience, it is meant to. While we do not like this use of the Law, it is necessary, even for us Christians. For, it is with the Law that we "daily drown the Old Man with all his sins and evil desires," that the Gospel might daily rise up the New Man "to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." The Word of God must be used to prepare His people for the true reason that God sent His Son into

⁴ Jeremiah 23:1.

this fallen world, among His fallen people – to die as the One truly right with God in order that He might give you reason for this week’s emphasis on God’s Promise. Our text reminds us of this, when we hear,

“In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, ‘YHWH our Righteousness.’”⁶

In the more ancient calendar of the Church Year, this week’s theme of the Shepherd King who will lead His people in righteousness shows up three Sundays a year. In the first half of the year, titled – the Life of Christ Incarnate - it is used to herald the coming of King Jesus, the Shepherd of God’s people to rule in majesty. Then, The Shepherd King motif breaks into Holy Week to lead us into how the Shepherd would save His people – by laying down His life for the sheep. There it serves as a bridge between the first half of the year and the second half of the year. In this second half of the year, the time we are in now, which is titled - the Life of Christ in the Church - the theme serves to recall God’s fulfilled Promise in sending Jesus as the Shepherd King who rules in the Church through His Word declared by His chosen shepherds.

Rest assured: repetition of this theme in our Church Year is not done by mistake. Texts like those of today, and their placement throughout the year, display Jesus as the Promise to the faithful waiting on God. Jesus, as the Son of David, was raised up by God to call by faith the sheep God has named His own. As I stated earlier, this theme is particularly comforting to you who may be distressed by the state of affairs

⁵ *Jeremiah 23:3.*

⁶ *Jeremiah 23:6*

in our land and in this fallen world. Hear again the Promise of the Lord, the Good News for all who wait under the burden of sin for the deliverance of God:

Behold, days will come, says YHWH, when I will raise up to David (a) Righteous Branch, (a) King, and He will reign wisely and do righteousness and justice in (the) land.⁷

That promise was first declared centuries ago to the people of God who would see their kingdoms fall. It follows on the prophet's revelation which you have heard - that such destruction and dispersion would come upon them on account of their evil shepherds - kings and priests - as punishment for all of their sins. The prophecy holds a promise that God would, through His Shepherd, appoint shepherds - overseers - who would be called to lead the faithful remnant of God's people. The prophet declares:

"And I will cause to set upon them shepherds, and they will care for them, and they shall not fear any longer, and they will not be dismayed, and they shall not be missing," declares YHWH.⁸

Those words are shown to be true in our New Testament era by the Gospel for this week. In it, you heard of the return of the twelve whom Jesus chose to send out with His power over unclean spirits. The Church's intent in coupling this day's New Testament and Old Testament readings is that you discern prophecy and fulfillment. You are supposed to get the connection between the prophecy of Jeremiah and the fulfillment in Christ Jesus sending out the disciples.

The shepherds of the New Testament are not simple national rulers. They are, by God's design, men whom He calls to oversee His Kingdom on earth - that which

⁷ Jeremiah 23:5

⁸ Jeremiah 23:4.

is often invisible under the visible nations of the world. In this Kingdom, God's overseers care for His people when they preach, teach and administer His Sacraments. This rule is not one of force, or might of arms, or rule of national law. It is a rule in, with and through the Word of God alone. It is the Kingdom that is governed by the Law, and freed by the Gospel, that is, in the proclamation of Christ-crucified - King David's Branch cut down and sprouting forth to new life. God, through Jeremiah declares:

Behold, days will come, says YHWH, when I will raise up to David (a) Righteous Branch, (a) King, and He will reign wisely and do righteousness and justice in (the) land.⁹

The image of those words, coupled with the text around them, is of a tree cut down to the stump. Yet, even though the might of the tree, its trunk and branches, have been dragged away to be used by men for human purposes, even some being cast into the fire, the roots are still alive. It is from that apparently lifeless stump that the Sprout was promised to shoot forth into the light of Day, to provide an home for the people of God. How long then, did the people who believed in this day's recorded promise have to wait before God brought it to fulfillment?

Hundreds of years passed. The faithful waited as the Northern Kingdom, Israel, fell in 722 BC. The branches of the Tree of David's line were being lopped off. They waited as the Kingdom of Judah was destroyed in 586 BC. The trunk of David's family tree was cut down. Through all these terrible times, the faithful are to believe that God works His will and fulfills His Promises in our time, according to His Timelessness.

⁹ *Jeremiah 23:5.*

Another six centuries pass. The stump of David's Tree appearing lifeless and abandoned. Yet the Root of the Promise ran deep into the well of Life. The Lord our Righteousness brought His Promise to completion when the Sprout of David was born sometime in King Herod the Great's reign. This Branch grew in wisdom and stature among men, until Good Friday, AD 33. And then, to the faithful remnant, it appeared to be cut off yet again! What did that do to this Promise?

*"In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, 'YHWH our Righteousness.'"*¹⁰

To human senses, it appeared that Jesus was not the Promised Branch of David. He was cut down, removed from life, and buried in the earth. Salvation seemed far off. The faithful few were again scattered. Their personal safety seemed to have been turned over into grave danger.

However, in the sense given to humans by God through the Faith, the faithful can understand that it was the cutting down of the Righteous Branch of King David that brought salvation, eternal safety, and the Name which is given for His people to bear. He is, in Himself, endowed with the full righteousness of God. As One possessing such, He imparts to His people perfect and complete rightness with YHWH. His justice is like no other ruler/shepherd/king, not even of that of His ancestor, King David. This Branch will not sin, and attachment to Him means that His sinlessness becomes your sinlessness! All that and more is held in our day's theme text:

¹⁰ *Jeremiah 23:6*

“In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, ‘YHWH our Righteousness.’”¹¹

The specific name in this text indicates that the Sprout from David’s tree is God, the One Who makes us right with God. With that understanding, the confessions of the evangelical Church, to which this congregation and her pastors subscribe without reservation, state:

We poor sinners are justified before God and saved solely by faith in Christ, so that Christ alone is our righteousness....¹²

That is what the world will not believe. But we who are grafted onto the Branch of David’s tree are suffering and waiting, living and dying, in the days when all Israel is being saved. Old Testament believers have been joined to the Branch of David’s tree, and the New Testament faithful are being attached to Him daily. Take heart – you are declared right before God, saved for eternity – for Christ is your righteousness!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Pentecost 7B (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44

July 19, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

¹¹ *Jeremiah 23:6*

¹² *Book of Concord, 472.1*

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:

“Woe to shepherds who are destroying and causing to scatter the sheep from My pasture,” declares YHWH.¹³

Therefore, thus says YHWH Elohe to Israel, upon the shepherds, the ones caring for the people of Me, “All of you have caused to scatter the flock of Me, and have caused to drive them away, and not all of you have attended to them. Behold I, am attending upon all of you the evil in your doings,” declares YHWH.¹⁴

“And I will gather the remnant of My flock from all the nations which I caused to drive them there, and I will cause to bring back them upon their fold, and fruitful they will be, and multiply.”¹⁵

“And I will cause to set upon them shepherds, and they will care for them, and not they shall fear any longer, and not they will be dismayed, and not they shall be missing,” declares YHWH.¹⁶

Behold, days will come, says YHWH, when I will raise up to David (a) Righteous Branch, (a) King, and He will reign wisely and do righteousness and justice in (the) land.¹⁷

In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, “YHWH our Righteousness.”¹⁸

NOTES

Jeremiah 23:6, Book of Concord, 472.1

It is the unanimous confession of our churches according to the Word of God and the content of the Augsburg Confession that we poor sinners are justified before God and saved solely by faith in Christ, so that Christ alone is our righteousness. He is truly God and man since in him the divine and human natures are personally united to one another (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 5:21). Because of the foregoing a question has arisen, According to which nature is Christ our righteousness? Two false and mutually contradictory teachings have invaded some churches.

² One party has held that Christ is our righteousness only according to his Godhead. When he dwells in us by faith, over against this indwelling Godhead, the sins of all men are esteemed like a drop of water over against the immense ocean. Others, however, held that Christ is our righteousness before God only according to the human nature.

Jeremiah 23:6, Luther’s Works, Vol. 35

¹³ *Jeremiah 23:1.*

¹⁴ *Jeremiah 23:2.*

¹⁵ *Jeremiah 23:3.*

¹⁶ *Jeremiah 23:4.*

¹⁷ *Jeremiah 23:5.*

¹⁸ *Jeremiah 23:6.*

Whoever reads this Bible should also know that I have been careful to write the name of God which the Jews call “Tetragrammaton”²⁷ in capital letters thus, LORD [*HERR*], and the other name which they call *Adonai*²⁸ only half in capital letters thus, LOrd [*HErr*].²⁹ For among all the names of God, these two alone are applied in the Scriptures to the real, true God; while the others are often ascribed to angels and saints. I have done this in order that readers can thereby draw the strong conclusion that Christ is true God. For Jeremiah 23[:6] calls him LORD, saying, “He will be called: ‘The LORD, our righteousness.’ ” The same thing is to be found in other passages. Herewith I commend all my readers to Christ and ask that they help me get from God the power to carry this work through to a profitable end. For I freely admit that I have undertaken too much, especially in trying to put the Old Testament into German.³⁰ The Hebrew language, sad to say, has gone down so far that even the Jews know little enough about it, and their glosses and interpretations (which I have tested³¹) are not to be relied upon. I think that if the Bible is to come up again, we Christians are the ones who must do the work, for we have the understanding of Christ without which even the knowledge of the language is nothing. Because they were without it, the translators of old, even Jerome,³² made mistakes in many passages. Though I cannot boast of having achieved perfection, nevertheless, I venture to say that this German Bible is clearer and more accurate at many points than the Latin. So it is true that if the printers do not, as usual, spoil it with their carelessness, the German language certainly has here a better Bible than the Latin language – and the readers will bear me out in this.¹⁹

27 Tetragrammaton, literally “four letters,” is the technical term for the four-consonant Hebrew word for the name God, which is now commonly thought to be represented in English by the word “Yahweh.” When the Hebrews came to this name in speaking or reading they avoided uttering it because of its sacred character, pronouncing instead the word Adonai (Lord) unless (as at Gen. 15:2) it immediately followed the word “Adonai” in the text, in which case “Elohim” (God) was read. In written Hebrew texts the vowel-points of Adonai were given to the consonants of the Tetragrammaton with the resultant rendering in English, “Jehovah.”

28 Adonai literally means “my lord,” but by usage it was in effect a proper name.

29 While the Hebrew *YHWH* always had reference to God alone, *ADN* could mean either the divine Lord, or a lord or ruler who was not divine. Luther distinguished clearly between the two words by rendering *HERR* for *YHWH* and either *HErr* or *herr* for *ADN* (cf. LW 12, 99-101 and LW 13, 230). The distinction between the divine and human within *ADN*, however, was not consistently maintained in translation by the use of *HErr* and *herr* (cf. *WA*, DB 6, 538-539, note on Matt. 1:20). Cf. Luther’s *HERR-HERR* in Jer. 23:5-6 with the RSV LORD-LORD, Luther’s *HERR-herr* in Gen. 24:12 with the RSV LORD-master, and Luther’s *HERR-HErr* in Ps. 110:1 (1545 version only, the earlier versions being both *HERR-HERR* and *HERR-herr*, *WA*, DB 10^I, 476-477) with the RSV LORD-lord. In Luther’s Matt. 22:44 rendering of the first “Lord” of the Psalm quotation he went from *Gott* in 1522 through *Herr* and *HErr* to *HERR* in 1539 and later editions (*WA*, DB 6, 100, note). See Gen. 15:2, 8 where Luther translates *ADN YHWH* as *HErr HERR* (*WA*, DB 8, 73). Cf. also *WA*, DB 10^{II}, xxiii, n. 26.

30 Cf. Luther’s statement, “It was necessary for me to undertake the translation of the Bible, otherwise I would have died under the mistaken impression that I was a learned man.” *WA* 10^{II}, 60, ll. 13-15; cf. also *WA*, Br 2, 423, ll. 48-50.

31 Cf. Luther’s *Defense of the Translation of the Psalms*, in this volume, pp. 209-223.

32 Cf. p. 117, n. 1.

¹⁹Luther, M. 1999, c1960. *Vol. 35: Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther’s Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia