

Sermon Jeremiah 23 1 16 8th Sunday after Pentecost Series B

Sermon: 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Jeremiah 23:1-6 (vv.3,4)

Theme: Scattering X Gathering

Goal: God gathers His people together under the shepherding of the Chief Shepherd Jesus and His helpers, in spite of the efforts of the enemies to scatter His flock.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Shepherd was a well-known term in the Old Testament to refer to political rulers as well as to spiritual priests and leaders of God's people. The people, like a flock, were led by their shepherds and depended on the decisions of their leaders. If they had good shepherds, the people enjoyed peace and prosperity. If they had bad shepherds, the people suffered under their injustices.

I – People scattered in Jeremiah time

Many good leaders had given stability to God's people. David was always remembered to be the one who had united the twelve tribes as one people, conquered the enemies around, and passed a peaceful nation to his son Solomon. David was the hero and the model of a good shepherd.

But after Solomon a sequence of kings did evil things, following other gods and being wicked, exploiting God's people. From time to time God sent prophets and priests to call the king and the people to the right way. Many of them gave hear to God's messengers and returned to the right way, restoring the worship to the true God and practicing justice. But many others didn't listen to God's Word and just followed their own way. And people suffered the consequences of many wicked kings and of non-committed priests, following their wicked ways too instead of reacting and looking for God's help.

Therefore God pronounced a curse against those wicked leaders: “Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pastures... 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.”

Jeremiah was sent by God as a prophet in a very hard time. *He obviously was not happy with the current administration* (Phil p. 12). The patience of God had gone and He allowed His people to be conquered by the enemies and be taken to exile in foreign lands. People were scattered all around the world due the failure of their political and spiritual leaders. They couldn't gather in the temple anymore to worship God. Far from their country and far from the temple, which eventually was destroyed by fire, they were now missing what they had previously despised. When they had the chance to worship God in the fellowship of their brothers, they run after their pleasures and didn't take time to come to the temple. Now, in the exile, they remember with sadness the old good days that never more would come back (Psalm 42:4; Psalm 137). They were all like sheep without a shepherd. – This all happened around 600 B.C.

II – God's people scattered nowadays

2015 after Christ. What is the situation of our political leaders, not just in our country, but worldwide? What is the situation of the church spiritual leaders worldwide? Are they gathering people around God's will as good shepherds of God's people, or are they despising God's will and following their own will, scattering people from the right way? Recent decisions made by Church Councils and by governments affront God's will as revealed in the Bible. On the other hand, by lack of good food and because spiritual leaders didn't bestow good care of the flock, the sheep are scattered, following

other voices, eating from other pastures, and not gathering around the true God anymore. Big churches are empty and some have been sold to be transformed in restaurants, houses and pups. Where once big flocks used to gather around Lord's Table of grace and love, now just a remnant remains, or even no single sheep can be found in some places. People complain remembering the days of old, saying that they were better; but very seldom someone comes back to the source, to the Good Shepherd and to the remnant of His flock.

St. Thomas is not an exception. Even as a young church – we are almost 22 years old – St. Thomas experienced up and downs, shepherds who gather God's sheep, and shepherds who scatter God's flock. Some sheep, deceived by false promises, or looking for other pastures, abandoned our fellowship. Others are still lying down in their comfort, or so distracted and busy by their jobs and material goals that they don't follow the voice of the Good Shepherd any more when He calls them. If all who once sat on these chairs would be here today, we wouldn't have enough chairs and room in our church.

Is God still upset as He was in Jeremiah's time? Will He say a curse upon the false shepherds who are deceiving and exploiting His flock?

III – The Good Shepherd gathers the remnant of His flock

There is still hope as it was in Jeremiah's time. God never abandons His sheep, even if just a remnant remains. God promised: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock ... and will bring them back to their pasture... 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... He will be called: The Lord

our Righteousness.” This prophecy points straight to Jesus, the Messiah, the Branch of David. The concern of God on His people is that big that He Himself takes over the responsibility of shepherding His sheep. And He did it when He sent His Only begotten Son Jesus Christ to be our Good Shepherd. When Jesus saw the large crowd waiting for Him at the shore of the lake, “He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things” and fed them with bread and fish (as we hear at the Gospel today, Mark 6). He introduced Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, a Shepherd that “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11), as He did on the cross. A Shepherd that guides His flock even through the valley of shadow of death to reappear alive and victorious at the other side, giving us hope and eternal life!

Conclusion: The Apostle Peter, having in mind this background of bad and good shepherds, he himself having been chosen to be a shepherd of God’s flock (John 21:15-19), wrote to his fellow shepherds and ministers: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

God gathers in our church people coming from difference places and backgrounds. He has many others in His plans to gather as well. As shepherd and sheep we welcome all in the name of Christ, praying that God shall bring to our fellowship many others, for the glory of His name and the salvation of many. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 19 July 2015