

“Good Shepherds”

SHEPHERDing Commissioning Sunday
September 8, 2013

Jeremiah 23:1-4

¹ *"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the LORD. ² Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. ³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. ⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD. (RSV)*

Jeremiah's prophetic voice calls us again this Sunday. As we know Jeremiah was a prophet in and through the exile of the people from Jerusalem to Babylon. We have heard how he called the people to find God during the exile, to find God in and amidst the changing Empire. Jeremiah in our scripture today is talking not of the time of exile under the current ruling Empire but of the hoped for restoration of the people.

All in all we have had a pretty spiritually fulfilling Summer as a Church. We have studied a lot together, learned a lot together and we have come to Summer's end knowing more about ourselves and what it means to be a Shepherd and a Sheep in God's kingdom. We have truly as a congregation been blessed to embrace all that Shepherding and being God's Sheep entails in our lives. We know what it means to be a true Shepherd, we need to Show Up, Hear Them, Encourage, Pray, Help, Example, Remember and Do What It Takes. We have heard and know what it means to be Good Shepherds as God calls us to be of God's flock.

Our scripture today however has a pretty harsh warning for Shepherds who fail in their duties whether by default or design. Our scripture says that as Shepherds we are not to scatter the sheep. Jeremiah is calling out the empire that scatters the sheep so far from God. Well for many of you not here last week we came to a realization about Jeremiah's prophetic voice. You see why Jeremiah is a prophet is that his voice while specific to a particular time frame also applies to us today, his prophecy still resonates and calls us to action today.

Jeremiah is calling out against the empire for scattering the Sheep of God's kingdom. The Empire he referred to was Babylonian. For us today we do not have an empire of people taking over. We have an empire of things taking over the empire of smartphones, gender equality, ipads, projector screens, ageism, new music, tablets, live streams, websites, sexism, and the list can go on and on. That is the ruling empire we live in and under. Our world has changed and we are displaced from God because of our smartphones, ipads, vacations, jobs and that ongoing list right?

You see it is true that our world is changing drastically that we have access to so much. But it is pretty hard to hold a smartphone accountable for taking a sheep aka us away from God's pasture. They are a thing controlled by the hand holding it, using it and allowing it to take over. You see, we today are the empire pulling ourselves away from God. It is not always a drastic life change that happens. It is not always noticeable at first. Today's empire is subtle. We excuse ourselves for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. It is not always the excuse of being unable to attend due to work. Sometimes we excuse ourselves even when we are present. We are there but not truly focused not truly engaged in what is happening, we pull out our pencils and jot a list down of the things we need to accomplish later, we pull out are phones and look up something or check emails or even facebook.

We are sheep who are lost and it is no one's fault but our own. We are not lost because we do not know the Lord that is a whole different group of people. We are lost because we wandered our own way always assuming that we

knew the way back. Yet when we turned around there was not some magic trail of breadcrumbs that was still there, those crumbs were gone. So to find our way back it takes the Good Shepherd to call us home. The Good Shepherd sends us wonderful people who keep us grounded, who keep us knowing who to turn to when we lose our way. The Good Shepherd sends us Shepherds who have committed to watching over us and caring for us and nurturing us in our faiths.

Those Shepherds will call us back when we have wandered will keep us connected to our home fold, this place and this Church, this body of believers. And as Jeremiah says to us by these Shepherds God will gather up his flock and bring them back and cause them to be fruitful and multiply and they will not fear any longer in finding their way and no one will be missing because God has called us to be Shepherds and Sheep as faithful believers. Amen.