

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: We see them almost every day: people who have lost their way and just can't seem to hold it together. Some of them are members of our family. The truth that we see in today's readings is that we all need help at different times, that none of us really has it all together, and that we all need a shepherd, we need Jesus. The power of the Christian tradition and of the Jewish tradition from which we take the readings from the Old Testament comes from this basic fact. Faith is not something extra that we do in order to win points with God and gain admittance to heaven. Faith is who we are; it is what founds our lives and helps us to hold it together. We may long for heaven, where things will all make sense, but for this time and in this life, it is faith in the shepherd of Israel, the good shepherd who is Jesus, that holds our life as precious, helps us to do what is right and makes us worthy to come to Communion.

So Jesus looks on us with compassion and gives us his life as the compass for our own. God comes to shepherd us by sending Jesus and so the wonderful hymn of trust contained in Psalm 23 is our song of gratitude. The letter to the Ephesians reminds us of how Christ as destroyed barriers and brought the deep peace that will keep us true to his name and guide us home at the last. We who were without a shepherd are now sheep of one flock in Christ. In age of the church we can hear the call of the one who knows us and trust as he leads us through death to life.

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First Reading Jeremiah 23:1-6

I will gather the remnant of my flock and appoint shepherds for them.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah

Woe to the shepherds

who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture,
says the LORD.

Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
against the shepherds who shepherd my people:

You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.
You have not cared for them,

but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.
I myself will gather the remnant of my flock
from all the lands to which I have driven them
and bring them back to their meadow;
there they shall increase and multiply.
I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them
so that they need no longer fear and tremble;
and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;
as king he shall reign and govern wisely,
he shall do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah shall be saved,
Israel shall dwell in security.
This is the name they give him:
"The LORD our justice."

The word of the Lord

Jeremiah 23:1-6 Commentary by Maribeth Howell, OP:

This passage from Jeremiah focuses attention upon Judah's kings who had failed miserably in the role that had been entrusted to them. It is not uncommon in the bible for kings or leaders to be referred to as shepherds, since the responsibility of each was to protect those within their care. It follows, then, that the people are sometimes referred to as sheep. These metaphors are used in a very similar manner in chapter 34 of Ezekiel, as well as in several New Testament texts.

Today's verses fall within a larger unit of material (21:11-23:8) that give attention to the misuse of royal power. From the passage, we can imagine that the exile has begun and that its cause is directly attributed to the failure of the monarchy. "It is you who have scattered my sheep and driven them away" (v. 2).

The good news is that this indictment is followed with words of hope. Not only will God gather the scattered sheep, but God will raise up other shepherds who will protect this beloved flock. There is no need to fear. God has not and will not leave the sheep unprotected. In verses 5 and 6, the promise is expanded. The words speak of a restoration of the Davidic line and proclaim the reign of king who will indeed fulfill the covenant. This king will be just and wise, and will be called "the Lord our justice."

Much of what we hear in the concluding verses of today's reading sound familiar to us. They are, in fact, quite reminiscent of words found in Isaiah, particularly those texts that we associate with the season of Advent. There, like here, words of hope speak to us of a time to come and they remind us that the present is not the end.

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Second Reading Ephesians 2:13-18

Christ is our peace who made both one.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

In Christ Jesus you who once were far off
have become near by the blood of Christ.

For he is our peace, he who made both one
and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh,
abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims,
that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two,
thus establishing peace,
and might reconcile both with God,
in one body, through the cross,
putting that enmity to death by it.

He came and preached peace to you who were far off
and peace to those who were near,
for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The word of the Lord

Ephesians 2:13-18 Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme:
The CRUCIFIED CHRIST established PEACE between Jews and
Gentiles.

By being baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, those "who once were far off," that is, Gentiles separated from and often at odds with the Jews as the chosen people of God, "have become near by the blood of Christ" to God and his salvific benefits. By his death on the cross Christ "broke down the dividing wall of enmity"--an allusion to the wall separating Gentiles from Jews in the Jerusalem temple. Abolishing the Jewish law and commandments as

the way to salvation, the crucified Christ created in himself "one new person"--one new cosmic human being consisting of Christ as head and the church as his body--thus establishing peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. Christ preached peace to those "far off"--Gentiles of all times and places--and "peace to those who were near"--the Jewish people. Now through faith in the crucified Christ all peoples have an equal access to God.

As Christians baptized into the "one new person" of Christ and the church, we, through our faith in the crucified Christ, can live in peace and reconciliation with all other peoples--those who are near and those who are far from us. With the crucified Christ as our peace we can break down the walls of enmity, prejudice, and discrimination that divide the peoples of the world.

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Gospel Mark 6:30-34

They were like sheep without a shepherd.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

The apostles gathered together with Jesus
and reported all they had done and taught.
He said to them,
"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."
People were coming and going in great numbers,
and they had no opportunity even to eat.
So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.
People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.
They hastened there on foot from all the towns
and arrived at the place before them.

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd,
his heart was moved with pity for them,
for they were like sheep without a shepherd;
and he began to teach them many things.

The Gospel of the Lord

Mark 6:30-34 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: This passage from the Gospel of St. Mark has the feel on an in-between reading, a connecting reading linking the mission of the Twelve to the

feeding of the multitude. Yet St. Mark lays down clear clues to his theological perception. First, the return of the Twelve offers an opportunity to balance the activity of mission with the necessity of contemplation. They are invited to "an out of the way place," to restore and refresh themselves. They have been active in mission and now they must find the silence of God's presence in the desert, far from the madding crowd, as it were. Second, the desert also calls to mind the wandering of the Hebrew people in the wilderness. They were hungry and Moses fed them with the miraculous manna. Verse 35, just after our reading, leads into the feeding of the multitude, though next Sunday we will hear not from St. Mark but from St. John about Jesus feeding the multitude with the loaves and the fish, a symbolic event pregnant with eucharistic significance. Jesus is the "greater than Moses" who will feed the people with the "new" manna from heaven in the wilderness. Third, Jesus is moved with pity because the people seem leaderless, without a shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who pastors his sheep, in this case by "teaching them at great length."

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