

Pentecost 9 (Proper 11)

July 21, 2024



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

We should learn from this psalm not to despise God's Word. We should hear and learn it, love and respect it, and join the little flock in which we find it, and flee and avoid those that revile and persecute it. Wherever this blessed light does not shine, there neither happiness nor salvation can be found.

– Martin Luther –

LW 12

Jeremiah 23:1–6

The prophecy that came from Jeremiah concerned God's plan for restoration of the exiles back to Jerusalem. "Woe to the shepherds," proclaimed the prophet. These ones who were supposed to be leaders, friends, and protectors of the people failed to look after them properly. The Hebrew word used for shepherd is *ra-ah*. The "shepherds" were actually the kings, Zedekiah and Jehoiakin, who were led into exile, by the conquering King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Their inability to resist capture and care for God's people caused further dispersment of Israel that had begun in the diaspora. The message through the prophet Jeremiah was that God would not look favorably on those who were entrusted to care for his people and failed.

- *In what ways does God hold leaders more responsible for their failure than those who are under the leader? (See Mark 9:42 for example.)*

God declared that he would gather the remnant of the flock and bring them home, reuniting Judah with Israel and "none will be missing." Unfortunately, this is a promise that has yet to reach its completion. What has reached its fulfillment is the promise of the long awaited Messiah. Out of the exile God promised to raise up a righteous branch from the line of David. He would shepherd God's people. As Christians we recognize that one as the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

- *How does Jesus fulfill the true calling of shepherd, unlike the kings and leaders who were exiled?*
- *In what way did Jesus reunite the remnant Israel spoken about here in Jeremiah?*

Psalms 23

One of the most beloved of all the psalms is Psalm 23 with its idyllic vision of man dwelling with the Creator in the pristine pasturelands he has set before us. We long for contentment like what is described in this psalm, "He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul." Not only does God bring rest and restoration to our being, he directs all our ways toward righteousness and holiness.

- *In what ways can we urge people to slow down from their busy lives in order to simply "be" with God? Why is this so difficult for so many? Who are we trying to please with our incessant activity?*

Post-modern Christians, somewhere along the line of their upbringing, have mistakenly taken hold of the notion of an immortal soul. This is an idea that comes to us from ancient

Greek philosophy and was taken up in the early church. Through the writings of the church father, Origen, who was a Platonic philosopher, this line of thought has permeated the views of Christians who remain uninformed of Hebrew thought about the soul. When we think like the Hebrews did we come to see the human person, not in a dualistic view of body versus soul, but in the true sense of *nephesh* – the essence of life that exists until death.

- *Why is it important to understand the difference between an immortal soul and "soul" as nephesh, the unified whole of the human person? Does it affect the way we view the resurrection of Christ?*

Ephesians 2:11–22

Have you ever gone to a gathering and felt like you just didn't belong? We can probably all think of an instance when we felt excluded from a conversation or group of people. It is not a comfortable feeling to be left out.

When the Gentiles were outside of the covenant people of God, Paul said, they were "separated" from Christ. The people were apart from Jesus in a significant way. They were not removed from Jesus because they had not been with him in the first place. Rather, they were independent of Christ. Being connected to and claimed by Christ was a new reality for those who were not of Jewish descent. The word Paul uses here is one which means foreigner or stranger. We might even say, one who was actually excluded from the gifts and presence of God.

- *Why is unity in Christ a reality that leaves no one on the outside? In what ways did Jesus understand what it was like to be alienated?*

Mark 6:30–44

The crowd that chased after Jesus and his disciples must have been with him on that shoreline for quite some time. Mark said that Jesus taught them many things and then as it grew late in the evening he sent the disciples to find something for them to eat. The disciples thought it was time for Jesus to disperse the crowd, but Jesus had other ideas. He wanted them to be fed with what meager provisions were available to them. The five thousand men who gathered, and presumably the women and children who were present but not counted, got to see the miracle of Jesus turning two fish and five loaves of bread into a feast with leftovers.

- *What does it mean to you that no one was left unsatisfied? Is that the same as being content?*