

Jeremiah 23:1-6
"Tending the Flock"
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 22, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

And God said, **"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds"** (Jeremiah 23:1, 2b).

Much like it was when Jeremiah was inspired by God to write this text in the 6th century BC, not much has changed.

As God has said, **"...there is nothing new under the sun"** (Ecclesiastes 1:9b), so it is today.

There were wicked shepherds back then and there are wicked shepherds today.

Likewise, there were lazy shepherds back then, like there are today. There were shepherds who were looking for favor outside of God back then and there are shepherds looking for favor outside of God today.

[Wicked Shepherds]

Now, back when Jeremiah wrote our Old Testament lesson, these wicked shepherds were only caring about their own well-being. They didn't care for their duties in gathering, nourishing and protecting their flocks.

These wicked shepherds were unfaithful to their vows in protecting God's flock from danger.

And, like it was then, today there are wicked shepherds in our time.

Today, there is a push by the sinful culture to be “inclusive” and to “coexist among all religions.” These ideas are infiltrating various major Christian denominations. It has even come to the point where many denominations are now concerned with the “overwhelming use of masculine language to refer to God.”¹

You may be thinking? Huh? *Overwhelming use of masculine language referring to God?* At least, I hope you are thinking that’s odd.

Aren’t we supposed to be using everyone’s preferred pronoun these days?

How dare we not call God by His *preferred* pronoun: He?!

These denominations are ready and willing to change God’s Word and to even change God’s Name. And this isn’t all about pronouns. They are even willing to change nouns. So, instead of saying “God the Father”, they would rather say “God the Creator.” Or, instead of saying “God the Son”, they would rather say “God the Redeemer.”

Well, you may be thinking, “What’s the difference, pastor?” Well, this is a slippery slope and a slippery slope that you should not want to go down, because God is quite clear: He is the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Yes, Creator and Redeemer are attributes of God the Father and God the Son, but this is not His proper name.

There is a reason why we begin each Divine Service in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We begin in this way to remember our Baptism and to remember that the Triune God is present with us.

Anything other than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) only causes doubt, and we should not want that in God’s House.

After all, shepherds are to gather, tend, nourish and protect the flock.

¹ Episcopal News Service: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/committee-hears-call-inclusive-language-book-common-prayer>

[Pastoral Standards]

For all those wicked shepherds who have caused doubt in God's flock, He says this: ***“You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you and your evil deeds, declares the LORD”*** (Jeremiah 23:2b).

You see, for all pastors, we are held to the highest standards of the Triune God.

At my ordination last year, I said the following:

“I believe and confess the canonical Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

“I believe and confess the three Ecumenical Creeds because they are in accord with the Word of God. I also reject all the errors they condemn.”

“I confess the entirety of the Book of Concord to be a true exposition of the Holy Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.”

These are three of the standards that I believe and confess as a Lutheran pastor.

So, if you ever catch me wavering on this, please rebuke me. Please hold me to account. And please continue reading and inwardly digesting God's Word in your life.

[My Story]

I have to admit that I take God's Word seriously for a reason. For God's Word has certainly affected my life.

For some, here at First Lutheran, you know of my story on when I joined the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. For others, that may be news to you.

Well, I grew up in an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – or ELCA – congregation. All was well, until it wasn't. The congregation called a new pastor when I was in high school and he began changing things – things that bothered me and more than half of that congregation.

Just a few years earlier, I went through confirmation and I was taught that the Bible was God's true Word of God.

Now, I was hearing that God's Word contained errors and that only parts of Scripture were God's Word. This caused me to question, "Which parts?"

This bothered me. This bothered me to the point that I began questioning my own faith.

I thought, "If the Bible wasn't true, then what's the point? Why come to church? Did Jesus really die and rise for me? Did God even exist?"

Later, there were wordage changes to the Lord's Prayer and to the Creeds. I was wondering: "Why is this happening?" Whenever I went to church there, I never left refreshed, but only frustrated.

Soon, the congregation began having congregational meetings over these issues. At two of the meetings, the Indiana-Kentucky bishop of the ELCA came and he said that nothing was awry at the congregation. He said everything was right in line with the ELCA.

This made me upset and I further questioned my faith.

While in college, I ordered a Book of Concord – our Lutheran Confessions – and I began reading through it. I soon realized that the ELCA left me. I realized that I was still a Lutheran Christian.

Then one day – in a soaking rain– I took the plunge. I got on my bicycle and rode to the LCMS congregation from my dorm. Though soaked in my dress clothes, I walked in to church and I felt at home. I felt refreshed. I felt forgiven.

Some months later, I began the new member class. As for the rest of that ELCA congregation, more than half of the members left. All but one family joined the LCMS. The lone other family joined the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod – or WELS – congregation.

What happened at that congregation has truly affected my life. I am thankful that I was educated by good Sunday school teachers and pastors prior to that point. And, on a side note, if this didn't happen, I may not have met my wife Melissa, so there is a silver lining.

This conflict may be why I am a pastor today. All of this has taught me to always take Christ seriously. And I take doctrine seriously, because as Luther says, “Doctrine saves.”²

[Changing Faith]

Thankfully, the sheep who left my previous ELCA congregation found a shepherd, but this is not always the case.

Many times when a pastor causes doubt, that person just wanders off from the Christian faith.

Sadly, my situation is not rare, because there are pastors and denominations that are leading their flock away from Christ and His promises of life, salvation and forgiveness of sins for the sole purpose of being liked by the world.

Today, there are denominations that have changed the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds to gender-neutral language. There are denominations that have changed the Lord’s Prayer to omit “Father”, because it may offend somebody.

[Stand with Truth]

*“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason...my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”*³ – Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, 1521.

Luther spoke those words when the Roman Church ordered him to repent of his writings. Luther responded saying, “Here I stand!”

The Reformation was all about getting back to Scripture – Sola Scriptura, Scripture Alone. The Reformation was not about running from Scripture to create something new.

Now, I know many of you here today have family in denominations that have made these changes. I urge you to reach out to them as ask them if these things are happening in their congregation.

² Kurt Marquart, *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics Volume IX: The Church* (The Luther Academy: St. Louis, 1990), 58.

³ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1978), 182.

If false teachings are happening there, urge them to fight for God's Word or leave and find a congregation that is abiding by God's Word. But, please don't remain there and do nothing. For by doing nothing, you are accepting false teaching.

At the same time, I hope everyone here at First Lutheran Church remains in God's Word and holds me to account, for I am a sinner, as well.

And I'm not here to say that the only way to salvation is through the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, because I know it's not. But as a synod, we vow to be faithful to God's Word.

The only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and trusting in His promises. Trust means to be faithful and not to waver.

The Apostle Paul writes: ***"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment"*** (1 Corinthians 1:10).

And our Lord Jesus said: ***"There will be one flock, one shepherd"*** (John 10:16).

As you can tell, doctrine matters. True doctrine leads us on the path of Christ.

As the Apology of the Augsburg Confession states: *"The ungodly teachers must be avoided because they no longer act in the person of Christ but are Antichrists."*⁴

Also, the Formula of Concord says this on false teachers: Those who have contempt for the Word of God, push it away, slander it, or persecute it are not considered to be the elect. Likewise, those who only present an external appearance of being believers, or those who seek another way to righteousness and salvation apart from Christ are not the elect.⁵

[The Remnant]

Now, there is good news!

⁴ Kolb-Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000), 183.48.

⁵ Kolb-Wengert, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Lutheran Church* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000), 637.39-40.

God says, ***“Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply”*** (Jeremiah 23:3).

Well, God certainly gathered me back to His fold. Likewise, others who have remained faithful to God will be gathered back to His fold.

You see, no matter how bad things get, there is always a remnant. God always keeps His promises and preserves a remnant of people who are His holy people.

So, even when steeples are falling, crumbled have spires in every land, the church bells are chiming and calling, because built on the Rock of Jesus Christ, the Church shall stand.

[The Righteous Branch]

These church bells ring because Jesus Christ is coming! He is going to make His triumphant return!

For, Jesus is the righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5).

For us sinners, Jesus was nailed to branches and died to grant us forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. He died to make us saints. He died to make us holy.

For us sinners, Jesus rose from the dead. He is no longer nailed to those branches. He has freed us from sin, death and Satan. He rose to give us faith and hope in His promise.

He rose so we would follow Him. For Christ alone is our foundation, not any worldly treasure. In Christ alone, we have grace. In Christ alone, we are sheep following the one and only Good Shepherd, who gives us all that we need. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠