

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So we have at the very beginning here, Jeremiah. And Jeremiah is a prophet much around the same time as Amos, a little bit before Amos that we talked about last week. So these are both prophets that are talking about the coming destruction of the nation of Judah. Now, before this, Israel has already been destroyed, already wiped out in Jeremiah's day. And so Israel has been wiped out and Judah is going to be brought into exile very soon. And Jeremiah is the prophet that gets to see all of this take place. He gets to see Judah taken into captivity. And so he is crying out to the people of Israel, or people of Judah, and trying to declare they need to repent. But the problem is the leaders, the shepherds of the people of God, are unfaithful. They're more interested in their own health and their own well-being and their own wealth, rather than the good of the people.

They're interested in the approval of man rather than the approval of God. What was going on in this time of Jeremiah's day, or Judah, the southern tribe was very prosperous. Everything was going smoothly. Israel, for that matter, was going well as well, before they were wiped out. As far as the social economics go, everybody had a good job, they had enough money to buy the food and everything else that they needed, Israel was prosperous, Judah was prosperous. But underneath of it all, as we spoke of last week, they were out of plumb. They were out of alignment. They were not following after God. Even the southern tribe, even in Jerusalem, they were not following after God. And so Jeremiah is warning and giving a threat to the shepherds in particular, because they have destroyed and scattered the sheep by teaching false teachings and by allowing people to participate in sin.

And so he says that he is going to repay them and attend to them for their evil deeds, but he's still going to gather a flock. Now, I find that passage particularly daunting for myself. As your shepherd, I'm very cognizant of the fact that my job is to make sure that you follow after God's word. That I preach nothing but God's word and his word alone. And if I ever stray from that, then I am danger of leading you astray, and I am danger of receiving the same judgment that Jeremiah is talking about the shepherds of Israel. And that's a frightening proposition to me. So I'm very careful, I hope and I pray, to preach the word of God to you in its truth and purity.

Part of this passage in Jeremiah is part of the reason why any pastor who is called by God really does not want the job, because we know what is called of us. We know what God expects of us. And we read these passages in Jeremiah, another passage about it's better for us to have a millstone thrown around our neck rather than to cause one of the little ones to stumble. That's my job. I'm to make sure that your little ones, my people, my flock, do not stumble. And I will be held to account if I teach something that does cause you to stumble. That's frightening. So I ask,

please pray for me, as your shepherd, that I might be faithful to the calling of God, because God has called us to bring people into the family of God. We brought Jane into the family through baptism, through one spirit, whether they be Jew or Gentile, whether they were raised in the church or whether they're outside of the church, we are all called by God's word to hear and to gather together as one body through Christ who was crucified.

He became flesh for us that he might join the flesh of all people together in the saving knowledge of his salvation. And he did that through the cross as Paul says in Ephesians, that he killed the hostility that resides between God and man and between man and man through the cross, through his death. He enables us to have peace. Peace with each other, and peace with God. Now, I know many of us don't have Jewish ancestry. We can't legitimately claim that we are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by genealogy. So we are a part of that Gentile branch, the uncircumcised branch, that God brings in. And now it's neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, nor following all the dietary laws and clothing laws and other activities, civil laws that were given in the Israelites, the sacrificial laws, all of those have been wiped out. And we've been brought together as Jew and Gentile through the spirit, through the water of baptism, we are made one people.

And as one people, we are called then to live in harmony and unity with one another, trusting that God has placed good shepherds, not the good shepherd, but has placed good shepherds in our midst. So we are called to pray for those who are called to be ministers, those who are called to be pastors. Because after all, pastor is just the Greek word for shepherd. So as your pastor, I am called to shepherd you and be your guide. So I ask for prayers that I might be faithful to that word, and I pray for you that you might hear that word and grow, grow in your faith. Because I never want you to be in a place where the people of Israel where Jesus' day, where it felt like they were sheep without a shepherd. Because there have been people who were put in the place of leadership in Israel. Just like in Jeremiah's day, unfortunately, they didn't get a whole lot better by Jesus' day.

They were still leading the people astray. They were still leading the people to rely upon their own efforts and their own ideas for their well-being, rather than relying upon the word of God and his grace and his righteousness. Jeremiah says that God is going to send a descendant of David, who will be named the Lord is our righteousness. That is what we preach, that is what we teach, and that is what you are called to learn. That you are not the people of God, because you are Gentiles or Jews or you were born and bred Lutheran or whatever the case might be. You're not part of the family of God because of anything that you have done, but you are part, and we are part of the family of God because we have the righteousness of Christ given to us in our baptisms, and continually given to us in the Lord's Supper,

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in the absolution, in the preaching of the Word, in the reading of God's word, God continues to give us his righteousness that we can rely upon and stand firm in. Because Christ is the cornerstone of our faith.

And the apostles and the prophets build upon that. They're the foundation upon which they build us up. And we are called to be a dwelling place of the Lord, together as one body. And so we are to be forgiving of one another, we are to be gracious to one another, and we are to be faithful in sharing the message of those who are scattered around. Those who are not part of this family yet. Those who weren't born in the church, still God desires to be brought into the family, because he desires all people.

Israel that was scattered, Judah that was in exile, the Gentiles who didn't have the Old Testament and didn't grow up in the faith, those out there who don't know anything about God, all God desires to bring into the family. And we are called to proclaim that righteousness, to proclaim the love of God to all people, that they might be able to stand firm, that they might not be afraid, that they might not feel lost in this world. How many people in this world seem to be lost looking for something to give them a hope, to give them a security, to let them know that their lives are worthwhile and that they have a purpose? And the purpose is that they might be God's children.

And in being God's children, they might know that they are loved by God, and because they're loved by God, they know that God will give them all good things, as we know. I mean, let's face it. If God can feed 5,000 men plus the wives and children that were along with it, so that could have been upwards of another five to 10 more people than just the 5,000 men that are recorded, if God could feed all of those people with five loaves of bread and two fish, do you honestly think that he cannot take care of us? Do we honestly think that our problems are too big and unsurmountable that God cannot carry us through? This is an encouragement to us to walk in faith and trust in God. God will provide. Maybe not in the way we would like him to provide, maybe not in the way that it was easiest for us, but he does promise to provide, and he does promise that we will never be left alone.

We will always have a shepherd. That shepherd... I, not me, but the good shepherd, Jesus Christ, who is with us always, who will care for us, who does care for us, and who carries us through the hard and dark times of this world. We do walk through a valley of the shadow of death, and God promises and says that in this world we will have tribulation. But he also tells us to take heart. He has overcome the world. His rod and his staff, they comfort us. The rod and the staff, that imagery of the shepherd that defends us against the enemies, beats them off, protects us, and the rod and the staff that gently guides us and keeps us in the fold, keeps us in the pen, keeps us in a safe place. This is what God has promised to do. And he has

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promised to send his people, his shepherds, into the world that might proclaim that. That might proclaim, "Do not look at the man, look at the God whom he serves."

And so as these people gathered together in the wilderness, I love that idea that they were in the wilderness, that's kind of what this world is to us. It is a wilderness. We are not home, we are not comfortable, everything is not going well for us, we are in a wilderness. There are challenges to live here. And while he is taking care of us in this wilderness, he is also promising us that as his sheep, he will bring us to the green pastures, to the still waters, to the eternal rest that is waiting for us. That is the promise, that is the abundance, that is the true gift that he has given to us, and that is why we can stand firm.

That is why we do not need to be afraid when the world assails us, when challenges come our way, when fears assail us. We are not afraid, because we stand on the firm foundation of Christ and what has been proclaimed through the law and the prophets and the apostles and what is continued to be proclaimed through his shepherds that he has given to us. Trust him as your good shepherd, and he will never lead you astray. And he will always protect you and keep you in his loving care. May his grace, mercy, and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen. We confess the faith that God has given to us in the words of the Nicene Creed, page 158. Please rise.