

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

July 18, 2021

Psalm 23:1-6

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1–6 (ESV):

The Righteous Branch

23 “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares 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 deeds, declares 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, declares the LORD.

5 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

EPISTLE: Ephesians 2:11–22 (ESV):

One in Christ

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—
12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 6:30–44 (ESV):

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

30 The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For

many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. **32** And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. **33** Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. **34** When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. **35** And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, “This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. **36** Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” **37** But he answered them, “**You give them something to eat.**” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?” **38** And he said to them, “**How many loaves do you have? Go and see.**” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.” **39** Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. **40** So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. **41** And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. **42** And they all ate and were satisfied. **43** And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. **44** And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

Sermon 29 – Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

“Know Me”

Ephesians 2:11-22

Dear friends,

Ephesians is our letter for today, nice meaty little bite that it is, and in this letter Paul is beginning to unpack what he wants the Ephesians to know. What he wants the Ephesians to know is layered, its got some complexity to it, but its not hard to understand. He is talking about some of the consequences of salvation, some of the things that

salvation brings us, both here on this Earth and in eternity. He uses the Ephesians mixed heritage as an illustration of this. This is a Jew and Gentile congregation, gathered freshly together under the cross of Christ, and Paul finds this encouraging, an example for Christians throughout all the world. The job here is to figure out exactly what Paul is saying, because this part of Ephesians tends to blur together into a bunch of nice-sounding Christian nonsense.

Paul seems like he's trying to do too much in these early chapters, but what he's doing is tying together all the various bits of Christianity and showing how they work together, and how this was God's plan all along for the glory of His church. He talks about God willing all of this to be, that God has written history before it happens, and that God knows all the ins and outs of that history. He knows all the what ifs and choices you make. God does all this so that He can bring you – His church – to salvation and keep you there. Paul then talks about sin and everything awful that sin means, he talks about grace and everything wonderful that grace means, and he talks about how, finally, that means you are now Christian people. You have a job to do and that job is one that God has created you to do. With that, our lesson starts.

“11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” This is the illustration I was talking about earlier. The church in Ephesus comes from both Jew and Gentile families. To us this is nothing, to them this is a big big deal, showing the tremendous difference between the Old Testament times and the New Testament times. Before, being a Jew meant you had God's favor. Gentiles could get there too, but there was a process, it wasn't automatic and it wasn't taken for granted. If you didn't participate in the Old Covenant, if you didn't participate in Israel, God wasn't going to save you. It was that simple and that deadly.

Now that's changed, and Paul wants to talk about Jesus as the reason why. **“13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”** Jesus has truly established a new era, an era which welcomes all men, no matter who their mother or father was. We take this for granted, but this was so very much not the case in those days.

The “uncleanness” of the Gentiles is a reminder of the reality of sin. This isn't racism, it is a boundary line that God Himself maintains very sharply to remind us that we are not entitled to Him. We do not deserve God, we not deserve anything from God except wrath and pain. That is why we should remember this. Just as the Gentiles were to be separated from the people of Israel, so we are separated from God by our sin. Just like Jesus brings human beings together, so also Jesus brings us together with God.

Paul then goes into what this means for us. **“14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”** So much here. The dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile is broken just like the dividing wall of hostility between God and man is broken. Great, got that covered. What does this mean for us? We are sickeningly 21st century around here, questions of Jew and Gentile don't bother us. Paul says, though, Christ creates one new man in place of the two, making peace, and reconciling us both. That goes for all men, not just Jew and Gentile, that goes for all of us. There is peace and reconciliation for all Christians. We are reconciled with Christ, and we are reconciled with each other. Peace is possible for Christians, because Christians more than anyone else on this earth understand forgiveness. Forgiveness always starts with Christ, because as sinners our forgiveness is always skin-deep, it never really does anything. But when Christ forgives us our sins, suddenly our hearts are opened to forgive others, even if it takes years of teeth-gritting

effort. We Christians know what we have done, we know what sin means, we see how it hurts our lives and how it hurts God. We know the power of a heart that Christ has forgiven, and so when we forgive, it means something. It is, truly, one of the purposes that Christ keeps us on this Earth, to pass along the forgiveness we've been given. We cannot get people into heaven this way, obviously, but we can work hard to forgive the sins of our neighbor, and show people what indeed Christ has done for us. Someone hurt you. Someone has hurt all of us. Your work begins with that painful truth. Christ doesn't want us to forget the hurt, He wants us to do what He did, set it aside. Set aside your need for revenge, your need to make good, to get your pound of flesh. Instead, deliberately choose to do good, to meet that neighbor's needs. This is what Jesus makes possible. He makes it not hypocritical or passive-aggressive, He makes it real, because our hearts have been changed by His own forgiveness.

Everyone's trying to unite these days, to heal divides. That's fine, let 'em, maybe it'll work. Paul reminds us that if you want a true union, a true brotherhood, you look no further than the church. The nations of the Earth are made of men, and men are sinners, and that means they will fade, wither, and eventually die like all men do. Our works are no more perfect than we are. But Paul says that Christ is, and Christ heals our divide between God and men and men and men both. The church is the place of true unity. Do we fight? Yeah. Do we sin? Absolutely. Does that matter? It does. These things weaken us because they are unworthy of us. Fundamentally, though, they do not change who we are together, you and I. We are church. We are Jesus' sons by the faith that He gives us. That makes us one, it makes us together, united under His banner.

“8 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” Union is not the point. Everyone seems to think that its enough that we are one under Christ, but we are united *for* something in the church, and this is it. Through Jesus, we have access to the Father, and we do together. The church

is an embassy of heaven, and like an embassy it can always call back to the home shores. We are here to hear from Christ, we are here to speak to Christ, bringing Him our needs and wants and receiving what He has to offer. You aren't strangers and aliens to each other, and you aren't aliens or strangers to God either, and that is the greatest gift that God gives the church. The church has never been a building, it has never been a place, it is in all places. The church is a faith, yes, it is a community, yes, but most of all the church is those that know, truly *know*, who Christ is, what He has done, and that He watches over us. That is why we repeat these fundamentals truths, these basics, to each other, Sunday after Sunday. In these words we find who we are. We are fellow citizens of the kingdom of heaven, together, stationed on this embassy, far away from our true home. Our King, though, always has time for us, never stops giving to us, and we're here to remind ourselves of that, gird ourselves with it, before we go out. We go out in forgiveness, we go out in mercy, we go out as Christians, people who know God. That is what a Christian is. That is what you are. You know God. You know what He's done for you and you know what He's done in your life. What a wonderful gift it is to know God, to see Him at work, even when that work is confusing or frightening. Knowing Christ is knowing yourself, who you are. Knowing Christ is knowing what this world is, just a job we have to do, a temp gig, before we go to our true home. Knowing Christ is knowing what happens to our honored dead, that they've gone to their true home and are waiting for us. Knowing Christ is knowing all this is in hand, it all makes sense, it's all taken care of, and if doesn't seem like it, we can go to that Christ and tell Him that. Knowing Christ is knowing that we're not alone, that Christ walks with us, sacrifices Himself for us anew every day, that Christ is there for us at our longest days and darkest hours.

Amen