



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

November 21, 2010
Christ the King
Fred Morris

RCL: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Luke 1:68-79; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43
LM: 2 Samuel 5:1-3; Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4, 4-5; Colossians 1:12-20; Luke 23:35-43

Jeremiah begins with the deep conviction that God cares about the flock, God's people. In fact, God's central concern is for the flock's health and well-being. So when shepherds do not care for the flock, God's ire is stirred up and compassion flows for those condemned to lives shriveled up by poverty, those 'scattered' by unfaithful shepherds.

The leaders of God's flock risk divine punishment if they ignore the plight of widows, orphans, hungry and marginalized people. In Israel's context, leaders are not just the professional religious leaders—the "pastors" in today's parlance—but the political leaders as well. All who have responsibility for the care and well-being of God's people are at risk if they do not fulfill their responsibilities. Jeremiah goes even further: God will find leaders who will care for the flock as God wishes, recruited from across the face of the earth. They will provide for the safety of God's people.

What a judgment that is on the Church—and the churches—that so often are more concerned with their own survival and maintenance than with the care and protection of God's people. The completion of the new cathedral in Los Angeles, at a cost of more than 150 million dollars, produced a major scandal among the Catholic faithful in that city. Many felt that the social and economic problems afflicting the city's people called for the money to be spent on something other than bricks and mortar. In the aftermath, a number of key persons in the diocesan leadership were let go for lack of funds to pay their salaries.

Luke's Gospel begins with a vision of God's coming to redeem the people. Christ's coming is part of the process Jeremiah announced, of God providing leadership to save God's people, "to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins" (1:77). Christ's supremacy in the letter to the Colossians fits well with Jeremiah's proclamation of God's concern for the flock: "All things have been created through him and for him" (v. 16). And even though the gospel and epistle proclaim that his coming is to show God's incredible love for God's creation and creatures, the word of judgment

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States, 2004*.
2. America's Second Harvest, *Hunger in America, 2001*.
3. World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005*.



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against those who have not loved God's flock is strong and clear. This means that those in positions of power and authority also have to answer to God for how they used that power and authority to benefit God's people and face God's judgment even as did Jeremiah's faithless shepherds.

God's love and mercy are reliable, but pastors and other religious leaders, members of Congress, presidents and governors who ignore the needs of hungry and homeless people and others whose lives are blighted by the harsh winds of poverty will face God's judgment in no uncertain terms. In other words, saying, "Lord, Lord" is not enough; doing God's will is what matters. God's promise is to raise up new shepherds, new leaders to care for and protect God's flock, even as God prepares the punishment for the faithless leaders who ignore the people's cries for justice.

To be practical about this, consider the following. First, a rising tide decidedly does not lift all boats. Just look at the United States. Despite a strong economy, more than half a million children in the United States live in households that experience hunger¹. Further, some 45 million Americans have no health insurance of any kind. More than 23 million people—over 9 million of them children under the age of 18—sought emergency food assistance in 2001². Note that the federal poverty standard in 2005 was \$19,350 for a family of four. But millions of people working full-time at the federal minimum wage earn only \$10,712 per year, making it hard to make ends meet.

Now look at Africa. One Ghanaian saying goes like this: "If you see a man with his beard on fire, fetch a gourd of water and hold it close to your face." This is apt because sub-Saharan Africa is, with other scourges, aflame with debt—over \$231 billion worth, according to the World Bank¹. Despite fifty years of so-called "development aid," the 2000 gross domestic product per person in Africa was somewhere between \$350 and \$700 per year (estimates vary).

Where are the shepherds of God's people? More to the point, what are churches doing about all of the above?

Children's Time [LH]

What does it mean for a flock to be scattered, and then have a loving shepherd bring the flock back together? From Jeremiah's image, invite the children to go to scattered places in the sanctuary, where you've conveniently stationed adults in advance as targets for the children to go to. Act out the part of a shepherd who has lost sheep and looks

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diligently for them, and gather your dispersed children to come back together. Remind them that God is the Shepherd who brings us together, who cares deeply for the sheep and rescues any who are lost. Pray a word of thanks to God the Shepherd who cares for us and loves us.

Musical Suggestions

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind—The United Methodist Hymnal 358

God of Grace and God of Glory—The United Methodist Hymnal 577

Lord, Speak to Me—The United Methodist Hymnal 463

O Young and Fearless Prophet—The United Methodist Hymnal 444

Take Up Thy Cross—The United Methodist Hymnal 415

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