

# Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

## OPERATION REPO

Jeremiah 23:1-6

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. 2 Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. 3 Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

5 The days are surely coming, says 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 live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

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## DIAGNOSIS: Losing Operation

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Destroying and Scattering*

God gave Israel a monarchy and religious leaders ("shepherds")

intended to care for his flock) but just look what's happened. They've failed their responsibilities, they have not attended to the people entrusted to them, but instead have "driven them away" (v. 2) and scattered them. The result is a dismayed people living in fear (v. 4). That doesn't sound too different from the world we live in now days. In fact, Jeremiah's accusation could be leveled against all those in positions of authority, be we executives, politicians, parents, teachers, pastors, students, cashiers, citizens, playmates –we all have been entrusted with caring for the world and each other, and have failed miserably.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *The Wrong Operation***

Most likely, Israel's kings and religious leaders suffered from an overwhelming sense of hubris. Seriously, it's got to be hard not to feel right about yourself when you sit on the top of the socio-economic, -political ladder. Yet God, through Jeremiah assures them of his displeasure, that he will take back (repossess) what he had entrusted to them. By the tone of it—"I will attend to you for your evil doings" (v. 2)—we get the distinct feeling this isn't going to be a pleasant "repo" operation either. But then, it's not just that they've failed the good king/leader test and are being called to account. Their problem runs even deeper than that: they (and let's face it, we too) have operated under the mistaken impression that God operates the same way humans do. Such an assumption limits God to one *modus operandi*, called the Law. Ironically, even though they/we fail spectacularly at manufacturing their own rightness, they/we continue to cling dearly to the *modus*.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Woe***

"Woe!" is all that can be said for failures who don't measure up, when they get their comeuppance. But an even sadder "woe" results from their basic misunderstanding (mistrust) of God in the first place. By limiting God to his Law operation, they/we

totally miss out on experiencing His gracious side, totally miss out on being at the receiving end of his generosity. Such missing out is so serious that it disconnects one completely from one's life-source. Woe, indeed.

## **PROGNOSIS: Operation Repo**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God's Promise***

But through Jeremiah, God makes a promise that reveals He is more than a harsh law-enforcer. He promises that HE will re-possess the disheartened and scattered flock and "bring them back to their fold" (v. 3). He promises He will make them righteous. This promise will extend past Israel and Judah, and will include failed leaders, failed kings, failed, deluded Law-trusters. His repo operation will be accomplished by a special agent, an offspring of "David's righteous branch," who (we come to find out later) will be so lavish in doling out righteousness that everyone will gaspingly conclude "GOD is our righteousness!"

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Trusting the Promise***

In fact, the Promise reveals a God whose preferred modus operandi is one of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. By believing and trusting the Promise, it comes true! Now we know that his gift of righteousness actually cost God dearly—the life and death of his special agent, Jesus.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Living the Promise***

Furthermore, clinging to the Promise has a modus-operandi-changing effect within the hearts of promisees. They are freed up to behave towards others in the same way the Great Promiser has treated them —with forgiveness and mercy. This in turn brings about a peaceable kingdom, where people "shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing" (v. 4). All will feel secure as they are held in the Great Promiser's

tender embrace.