

# Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

## FAITHFUL SHEPHERD, FAITHFUL SHEEP

Jeremiah 23:1-6

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## Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. 2Therefore 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. 3Then 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. 4I 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. 5The 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. 6In 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: Broken Branch

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Scattered Flock*

Things are not looking good for the people of Judah. Their lives are in disarray. In sheep-herding terms they are destroyed and scattered, driven away, unattended. The setting? The southern

kingdom is at its bitter end. The other nations sit poised on Judah's borders, ready to pull them away from the life they have known. So much for good shepherds—Judah's kings have failed the people altogether.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Baaad Shepherds***

A weak and fragmented nation is bad enough, but unfaithful leaders are worse. These leaders have failed to protect, defend, and care for their people. The shepherds destroy and scatter the sheep, and it's not even their pasture. This pasture, along with its sheep, belong to God. The shepherds are merely hirelings, and they have failed their watch—not just by ignoring the needs of the sheep, but by ignoring the shepherd who owns them and the pasture.

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

Denying the needs of God's people is pitiable and criminal, but ignoring the Lord is faithless. Which is why Jeremiah speaks "Woe" to these wouldn't-be shepherds. God will attend to their evil doings.

**PROGNOSIS: Righteous Branch**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Wise King Who Reigns***

The only hope for the people of Israel is a shepherd who will actually care about their welfare. And this promise comes from God himself: "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" (v. 5). God will save Judah; the people will live in safety. But here's the catch: During Jeremiah's time, the people of Israel never discovered that king. On the contrary, they were marched into exile in Babylon, lived for 60 years there, and returned to a pale shadow of Judah, where no kings rose to power.

Fast forward 500-some years, though, and you will find a child born among God's people who is part of that righteous branch of David. A man who, for all appearances has no place among royalty, but who—in his teaching, and healing, and ultimately his untimely death—will lay down his life for the sheep. This man, Jesus, gathers God's sheep who are scattered, builds up rather than destroys. And by his gracious self-giving he calms the people's fears that they can never be who God intended them to be.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Fruitful Remnant***

This people is more than a nation, they are intended to be God's people. Not just a people with borders (although that does happen in fits and starts), but a people of faith. God's plan is to bring the sheep back to his fold so that they may grow and prosper. And not just those who started out in Israel, but the other sheep who belong to God's pasture. These are sheep who listen to God's good shepherd—a fruitful remnant; fruitful not so much in number as in faith. You could say his sheep hear his voice and they follow.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Telling It***

These people not only listen to the shepherd, they speak his praise, saying: The Lord is our Righteousness. But their words are not just lip service; they follow this Righteous One in deeds as well as words. For he will execute justice and righteousness through this faithful people. Faithful shepherd, faithful sheep.