

Pentecost 8, July 18, 2021

SERMON

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56; Jer 23:1-6; Ps 23; Eph 2:11-22)

Already, but not yet. That's the state of the Christian faith. Christ has *already* died for the sins of the world and for the salvation of all people—but still this world of sin and suffering continues. We're in the in-between time.

Already, but not yet. Two thousand years ago the death of Jesus on the cross put an end to dying and death so that all people might live forever—but people still die and are buried, survivors still grieve and suffer. We're in the in-between time.

Already, but not yet. Jesus defeated sin, death, and the devil once for all when he went willingly to the cross—but it's obvious we still live in a sin-sick world. We're in the in-between time.

Do you want to change the world? or to see the world changed? If that is to happen, then *all* Christians *everywhere* will have to live out the peace that is Jesus—his compassion, forgiveness, and mercy.

The words to the church in Ephesus don't describe some sinless standard people should strive for—they present a totally new state of being, one where there's no division from each other.

It's a reality that already exists because of the death of Jesus, but it hasn't yet become the norm because people don't believe it's for real. It's too good to be true—and besides, we'd have to give up ourselves if we wanted to live that way.

Our scriptures today describe the *shepherding of sheep*. In Jeremiah, God blasts the religious rulers of his chosen people because they haven't cared for those entrusted to them.

In the gospel, Jesus has compassion on the crowd because they're like **sheep without a shepherd**. They need what only *he* can give.

The twenty-third psalm—one of the most beloved passages in the Bible—describes the *faithful* shepherd. This shepherd is *not* like the ones in Jeremiah! The faithful shepherd protects and provides for his sheep, at all times and in all places. Indeed, the sheep have no needs or wants at all because the shepherd cares for all that is needful.

Psalm 23 reminds us that the most important words in the Bible aren't the laws or commandment that tell us what we "shall" or "shall not" do. The most important words in scripture tell us what **GOD** *has done, is doing, and promises yet to do.*

- **God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that *everyone* who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to *condemn* the world, but in order that the world might be *saved* through him (John 3:16-17).**
- **God is love, and all who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them (1 John 4:16b).**
- **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (Psalm 23:1).**
- **This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**
- **While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).**
- **Neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, nor the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).**
- **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5).**
- **Behold, God's dwelling place is among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).**
- **He who has begun a good work in you will continue to perform it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).**

In Mark's gospel for today, Jesus tells his exhausted disciples to **come away and rest awhile**. But when they get to the "deserted place" where he leads them, there's a great crowd that needs his compassion, and the help of the weary disciples.

The verses that follow this discouraging arrival tell the story of how Jesus feeds the 5000. That's the gospel for next week, and it ends with these words: everywhere he went people brought him those who were sick **and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed**.

Dear friends, *we* are the fringe of Jesus' cloak. We are his hands and feet, his voice and heart, his compassion and mercy. It's time for the whole Christian Church to live out that reality, because without Christ in their lives, the people of the world have no hope and are without God.