

Worship@Home 21st July 2024 With Revd David Speirs

Opening Prayer:

Loving Shepherd, you know our names; you care for us. When we face darkness and death, walk beside us. When we hunger for your love, fill us with your presence. When we are fearful, feed us at your table. May we dwell in the house of goodness and mercy all the days of our lives. Amen.

By Mary Petrina Boyd (<http://www.ministrymatters.com>)

Accessed at RE:Worship <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2015/04/opening-prayer-psalm-23.html>

STF 481 – The Lord’s my Shepherd (Psalm 23)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrSOVXOOepc>

The Lord’s my shepherd, I’ll not want; He makes me lie in pastures green,
He leads me by the still, still waters, His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone, And I will trust in You alone,
For your endless mercy follows me, Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness, And he anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy, I feast on his pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path, I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and your rod and staff. Are the comfort I need to
know.

*By Stuart Townend. Words & Music © 1996 Getty Music & Songs; Thankyou Music. Admin by Integrity Music and Capitol
CMG Publishing. CCLI Song Number: 1585970.*

Please read: Jeremiah 23: 1-6

<https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=490874251>

Time to Reflect

In order to more fully understand the reading that we have from the Book of Jeremiah today we need to consider the social and historical circumstances that the prophet is writing in. Judah has been twice invaded by the Babylonian Empire (in 598 and 587 BCE) which has resulted in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. Significant numbers of Judean’s have been forcibly relocated to Babylon to serve the Empire in a period that would become known as the exile.

Jeremiah's writing puts these events into a theological context, as the people try to work out why the disaster has befallen them. It is Jeremiah's assertion that it is Judah's failure to trust in and follow God that has resulted in the downfall of the nation.

In chapter 23 Jeremiah turns his attention to those who hold positions of leadership in Judean society. The 'shepherds' that Jeremiah refers to are both the political and religious leaders of Judah who have failed to attend to their flocks and have scattered them. The specific charges have already been outlined in the previous chapter. The sons of King Josiah, in contrast to their father who furthered the cause of the poor and needy, allowed injustice to grow through their selfishness (Jeremiah 22:17).

Idolatry, oppression, violence and the shedding of innocent blood, neglecting to take up the cause of the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner are all identified as sins committed by Judah's leaders (Jeremiah 22:8-9). This corruption and injustice weakened Judean society and has led it away from God. The destruction that follows is therefore an outworking of their bad leadership, which the prophet makes it ominously clear will have consequences for those leaders.

Jeremiah's utterances, which outline and explain the disaster experienced by the Judean people, are why he is often cited as being a prophet of gloom and doom. Yet we also have to recognise that Jeremiah also seeks to offer hope in a difficult situation. Jeremiah makes reference to the exilic remnant, now living in Babylon, who he states will find restoration by God's hand. Jeremiah is confident in the faithfulness of God as the true and ultimate Shepherd of the covenanted people. It is this confidence in God which leads Jeremiah to proclaim that God will gather and restore his flock.

This regathering will enable God's covenanted people to be fruitful and to multiply (Jeremiah 23:3) words that echo the promise that God offers to all of humanity in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 1:28).

Jeremiah also affirms that God will raise up shepherds who will actually shepherd the people and that none of the flock will be found to be missing (Jeremiah 23:4). Thus, through God's action there will be a complete restoration of the covenanted community where people will no longer live in fear, a reversal of their situation in exile.

Jeremiah then goes on to talk about a righteous branch from the house of David who will reign as King, dealing wisely and executing justice and righteousness in the land (Jeremiah 23: 5-6) and where the people will dwell in safety. For Christians interpreting this passage, it is the person of Jesus Christ who fulfils this prophetic expectation in his life, death and resurrection. Through Christ God's Kingdom is established amongst us and his way of love is made known.

In the 21st Century we see many examples of bad leadership within the world. Cruel and vain rulers whose corruption, lack of concern for the vulnerable, and embrace of violence leads to war, poverty, and oppression. Yet Jesus, the Good Shepherd, offers a different way, the way of love. It is the calling of the Church to embody this love in its mission.

So let us commit ourselves to following Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who leads us in the way. Let us uphold God's mercy and justice for all people and let us seek to live out our calling to love one another in Jesus' name.

Prayer of Intercession

You are invited to pray silently for: The needs of the world...
The Church and its calling...Loved ones going through difficult times...
For peace, justice, and reconciliation...In Jesus name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven...

StF 713 – Show me how to stand for justice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrMuTxZDGLI>

Show me how to stand for justice: how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions, how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy, whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence every day, in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting may I learn to walk with you.

By Martin E Leckebusch. Words & Music © 1999 Kevin Mayhew Ltd. CCLI Song Number: 3484230.

Final Prayer

In the Shepherd all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through the Shepherd God was pleased to reconcile to God all things, whether on earth or in the heaven,
by making peace through the blood of the cross. The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, has remembered us and forgiven us - the gates of Paradise have been unlocked; we are free to enter where the Shepherd reigns forever and ever! Thanks be to God! Amen.

Extracted from a prayer by James E. Janecek, in The Shepherd Reigns. Posted on the United Church of Christ's WorshipWays website. <http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways>

Accessed at: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/10/prayer-of-confession-proper-29c.html/>