

COMMENTS/QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS FOR JULY 21, 2024

Jeremiah 23:1-6

- Jeremiah witnesses Judah's exile into Babylon, and these verses reflect that situation. For what reasons does Jeremiah attribute Judah's exile? What hope does Jeremiah/God offer the Israelites?
- How have we as the church (in general, or as a denomination, or as Epiphany Lutheran Church) been like "the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of [God's] pasture"?
- How can we as the church be about God's task to "gather the remnant of [God's] flock out of all the lands"?

Psalm 23

- Our passages in Jeremiah and Mark emphasize the shepherds as representing religious leaders. Taking this approach to the psalm, what would happen if we looked at this description as a call to emulate God as shepherds? If we emulate God as the shepherd, how are we or how is the church called to be with others?
 - How are we called to restore one another's souls?
 - How do we guide others along right pathways?
 - How do we comfort and walk with people "through the valley of the shadow of death"?
 - What does it mean for us to "anoint [one's] head with oil"?

Ephesians 2:11-22

- Paul here describes how the work of Christ was to break down the dividing wall of hostility between groups, specifically between Gentiles and Jews. What are the different dividing walls do we continue to experience in our culture and in our church? How can we break down those dividing walls and bring about the peace of Christ?
- Paul also speaks of the community as built upon the past, "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," while growing into a future, "into a holy temple in the Lord." How do we build upon our past while growing into God's future? What is the role of tradition?
- The church historian Jaroslav Pelikan spoke of tradition in this way:
"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."

What do you think this means? How do we live this out?

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

- There is a tension within the Gospel lesson between the need for rest and rejuvenation in ministry and the pressing need of those around us. Notice how Jesus encourages that rest, while responding to the people who come to him and the disciples. Do you give yourself a time and period of rest? What can you do to encourage such rest in your lifestyle?
- At the same time, the passage shows that we cannot remain insulated from the needs of our community and world. What can we do to remain open to the needs that surround us?
- The gospel connects with the psalm and Jeremiah when it describes the crowd as "like sheep without a shepherd." What does the response of Jesus say about our own response to others?