

## Jeremiah 23:1-8

**23** 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."

**7** Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, "As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," **8** but "As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he[a] had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land.

Jeremiah is a difficult text for many. He is a prophet who doesn't mind to call people out and often uses devastatingly apocalyptic imagery. In other words, he is the king of doom and gloom. Some of the writings in this text are so awful to the modern ear that they aren't even scheduled in the lectionary and are referred to as "texts of terror, which is, at the end of the day, pretty accurate. However, today's reading, while still chastising his contemporaries, has the more open imagery of the shepherd and God's liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. One of the things I love most about the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is the powerful imagery of God as a Redeemer. God as the shepherd who Redeems the world leading it and people into freedom.

Often the church has promoted God's salvation as a cleaning away of our sins or the necessary death of Jesus to balance the books of our own misdeeds. Yet, today we read of a new righteousness to come from the branch of Jesse that will lead to justice and righteousness in ALL THE LAND. Furthermore, this is done by the God whose primary identity is found not in punishment or judgment but in LIBERATION. I wonder in this time of quarantine what new justice, what new liberation might God be calling us to? Might there be something in not returning to normal but something better than normal? How about those things we miss most will we find the courage and strength to cherish them? And, with all the anxiety, impatience, worry, anger, and stress that we are feeling now, will we find the strength and the courage to be empathetic to others who are experiencing this time differently? I know we can't always be wrestling with big questions but prayerfully God is still trying to be our Redeemer even in this very different time.