

*Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York  
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany~ Iglesia Luterana de la Epifanía, Hempstead New York  
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*Eighth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Proper 11B– July 18, 2021*

*Jeremiah 23:2-6*

*Ephesians 2:11-22*

*Psalm 23*

*Mark 6:30-44, 53-56*

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!*

Jesus may have been born in a stable to a young couple away from their hometown, but he was a born leader. And not the kind of first century leader who was responsible for his life and those of his family and friends – not like King Herod, who had executed John the Baptizer as a token of appreciation for his daughter’s dance on his birthday.

Jesus was a leader with compassion for his closest followers. After they returned from their first mission to preach and teach the gospel and to heal, he saw that they needed some sabbath time. He imaginatively took them to a deserted place to rest, to eat, to recover from their hard work because the crowds who were drawn to Jesus’ magnetic personality and charisma wouldn’t give them any peace.

But those same crowds somehow knew where the group was headed and got there by land before the boat Jesus and the apostles had taken arrived on the deserted shore. So, seeing that the people were “like sheep without a shepherd,” (Mark 6:34), Jesus cared for them and taught them many things until it grew late. So the people who had come to hear Jesus were affirmed in seeing him as a trustworthy leader.

Since they were in a deserted place, and it was time for a meal, Jesus was the resourceful leader. Like the Psalmist’s shepherd, and teaching the disciples again, now to use what was at hand, he had them take stock of the food among the 5000 men gathered (not to mention women and children). It seemed ludicrous; how could this group be fed with five loaves of bread and two fish (Mark 6:38)?

And Jesus demonstrated that he was an organized leader by ordering the disciples to get the people to sit in groups on the green grass – to have a peaceful place for a meal, unlike any other they’d ever had. There were no picnics in first century Galilee. And they did sit – in groups of hundreds and fifties, and the food was

blessed, broken into pieces and set before the people. And everyone ate to satisfaction, and there were twelve baskets of bread and fish left over; a symbol of wholeness. (Mark 6:39-43.) Again, like the Psalmist's shepherd, Jesus was a leader who provided for his followers, both those in his inner circle, and the many others, as well. He was a leader who treated people equitably, as their needs dictated. As Pastor-Professor Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary says of this account,

Jesus refuses to lead with the time-honored tools of domination, intimidation, manipulation, or prevarication. The people who flock to him have been discarded, plundered and denied dignity by their superiors. With him they experience the opposite.

And he notes that, "[t]hose are, of course, the very kinds of people that the Bible also tells us reside closest to the heart of God." ([Leadership that Liberates - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary.](#))

What do we learn from Jesus' leadership style? Well, since we're not fully divine, we probably won't create a Galilean picnic out of someone's lunch. But we are called to be leaders in our families and communities; in our workplaces and schools. If we call ourselves Christians, we are promising to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastor Israel Kamudzandu of St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, commenting upon our second lesson for today from Ephesians, says,

The gospel, as Paul writes, is strong enough to bring nations, ethnic groups, tribes, races, male and female into a human relationship, where they can live together as a new ... [end times] community whose DNA is belief in God, faith in Jesus Christ, and unity in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

([Commentary on Ephesians 2:11-22 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary.](#))

We are the people who have inherited Jesus' leadership role, and if we are to be faithful in our call, we'd be well advised to follow his leadership style. We have an example of the opposite situation in many parts of the world today – lack of faithful shepherd protecting their sheep – especially here in the United States. The word of the Lord, spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, warned of “the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep” of [God's] pasture. (23:1.) “It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.” (23:2b.) This

description brings to mind the millions of people who followed Donald Trump's leadership, and the hundreds of people who obeyed his command to go to the Capitol building on January 6 of this year, to interfere with the work of Congress. These sheep now face prosecution for any number of crimes, including homicide. And their one-time leader has not come to visit them in jail; nor is he providing legal defenses for them. They truly are sheep without a shepherd at this point.

So, how can we be faithful to Jesus in these challenging, confusing days? When we act out of the shared Christian vision of unity in diversity, when we commit ourselves to living in obedience to the common values of Christianity, when we have concern for our neighbors and live by trusting others, but first and foremost, by trusting God, then we will be true to our calling. When the love of God in Jesus Christ is the primary motivator in our lives, we will be leaders like Jesus. We know what we must do. We only need the strength and courage to follow through. And those resources are available to us through God's Holy Spirit, whose support we receive through prayer.

Let's pray. Holy God, you give us the model for our lives as Christians in Jesus. Give us the stamina to continue to live in love, reaching others with grace. Give us the courage to take stands that may not be popular, when we know they are right, in his name. Give us the strength to keep on the path, day after day, to know that we are part of his family, more and more, every day. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. C:  
Amen