

A Coronation and An End

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Cradock Presbyterian Church

November 24, 2013

It's a shame that we've made "Christ the King" Sunday into a kind of marker, a milestone. We tend to do that with holidays. Memorial Day has become the first day of summer, for a lot of folks. July 4 is our "summer holiday," the high point of summer. Labor Day marks the end of summer, even though Fall won't officially arrive until about three weeks later. Christ the King Sunday marks the end of the time before the Christmas season. You know it's always the Sunday before Advent begins. So it's the end of the Fall, and the beginning of Christmas. And of course, for us that means the Christmas *season* as a time of decorating, cooking, inviting people to things, buying gifts; a time of decorations and lights and Christmas music – you can feel it right now, can't you? That song was right: "It's the most wonderful time of the year."

And so we miss the point, miss the importance. Think about the name of this day. We know about Christ. What do we know about kings? All of them have to have a coronation. Right? A coronation is the beginning of the reign of that king. A new time has begun! But just as important – and here's something we don't think about – a coronation is also the end of an old time. Whatever went before is finished. It's now just something to look back on.

If you look back on Israel's history right before Jesus, you see a mess. You see how a bunch of bad kings had led the people astray, with the result that they suffered great harm. Jeremiah uses the imagery of a shepherd. Shepherds have flocks; kings do, too, especially kings of God's holy nation Israel. The people are their flock. Shepherds are supposed to look out after the welfare of their flocks, and not their own

welfare. Israel's kings were supposed to bring safety and prosperity to the people; but their most important job was to bring the people to God. Read verses 1 and 2 of our passage and you see it. Jeremiah says the people have been scattered, and we know that's true. The bad kings, bad shepherds, disobeyed God, and led the people into disaster, first at the hands of the Assyrians and then the Babylonians. When the people came back into the land, the bad times continued. First the Syrians, then the Greeks, then the Romans came in as overlords. None of that was necessary. If the kings had been totally devoted to God, if they had insisted that the people be drawn to God, then none of the bad would have happened. But because they got into their own things and didn't properly "shepherd" the people, the people wandered off like sheep, they wandered away from God. There had been only one king who was totally devoted to God, and that was David. And that was very early in the life of the nation. There had been centuries of God's sheep wandering around. Of course, wandering sheep are the ones who get hurt, who get themselves in trouble. Some even die.

But God wasn't willing to leave his sheep to die or be hurt. So God would do the retrieving. Verses 3 and 4 tell us that. God will bring them back to the fold, and "they will be fruitful and multiply." God will raise up shepherds over them who will chase away their fear and pain. Truly, a new time will begin. Verse 5 makes it clear that there will be an ultimate shepherd, one in the line of David, and listen to what Jeremiah says about him: "he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." Verse 6 completes the thought, that in this new time "Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety." And then the final thing: he will be so much

“of the Lord” that his name will be “the Lord is our righteousness.” The word translated “righteousness” here has more the meaning of everything being right, the way God intended it; one sub-meaning is prosperity. Here’s the simple way you can say that: “God will make everything right.” In other words, their time of darkness and pain was now going to end; things were going to turn around. The coronation of this new king, whom WE know as Jesus Christ, meant the end of the old time and the beginning of a powerful new one.

Today is an ending, too, and the beginning of new time for this church family. The beginning is in its beginnings; much is going to happen. Now, I’m not saying that we’re exiting some time of darkness, or that anybody is a bad shepherd or anything like that. It isn’t like that at all for us. This time that ends today is just something to look back on. And look back on it we will! I’ll remember all kinds of great times, great things we did together. I’m sure you’ll remember ‘em, too! New things like our Walk With the Cross, our many Good Friday Fish Fries, the awesome Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve services we developed. We took on some new things by way of helping people, too: like the food bank thing every second Saturday, like housing the homeless. I could go on and on, but that’s not what I want to emphasize. That’s all just looking back. I’m emphasizing the positive fact that a new time, a new *needed* time, is beginning. God is beginning to bring things back together again. God is raising up new shepherds for his scattered flock – people who you haven’t seen yet, because they’re so far scattered. YOU are those shepherds he is raising up. Listen to the way Jeremiah writes the prophecy – God is raising up *shepherdS*, plural. Oh, there will be a single king, and you

know him, he's why you're here: Our Lord Jesus. In him, God has made everything right; you already know that, you've already lived it. And in the coming weeks of Advent and Christmas, you'll get to celebrate it. There is even more yet to celebrate, you just haven't done the things to get to that celebration yet, not yet. You'll have to work like the shepherds of old did – hard! – before you get to celebrate these new things that are coming. Don't be afraid of that; you also know that God, the owner of the flock that is us, has raised up the ultimate shepherd king, our Lord Jesus. In him, God makes sure that everything is made right, and stays right. He'll keep everything right through you. As the time of this old ministry here ends, I have confidence that God will gather you together and, like the loving shepherd he is, give you everything you need.

So think about it this way: this is the time of God's salvation, and the time of prosperity and closeness to God, that is now beginning. I say to you: Be strong; keep the faith; watch out for the sheep you're called to gather, those ones who are not yet here. Watch out for each other! And give thanks for the new time that begins on this very special day.

We thank you, our God, that you never leave us alone. You always gather us back in to you, no matter how far we wander away. You'll never let any of your sheep get totally lost; you'll always go after them, you'll always send someone after them. Let us live joyously by this truth, and in our joy lead us to go after others who are lost, so that your flock will be full and healthy. Encourage us in the hard times, and celebrate with us in the good, for we ask it in the name of the great shepherd of ALL the sheep, Jesus our Lord, AMEN.

