

Prayer of Preparation: *Lift Him up, lift Him up, lift the savior up, still He speaks from eternity: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Me.”* Gracious God, may we forever be found lifting up the sheep of your pastures. **Amen.**

We are at the end of a three-week sermon series in which the prophets have a word for the people. First it was Haggai, sharing the past, looking at the present, and casting a vision for the future. Haggai taught us that a prophet’s job is to call us to look around and see ourselves, God’s people, as the church. Haggai, very sternly, reminds the Israelites, and us, that God did not bring bricks and stones out of Egypt. No, God brought God’s **people** out of Egypt so that we may serve God. Haggai, to make a long story short, reminds us that the church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place...the church is a people. And that people are us.

Next, we have Isaiah. Isaiah reminds us of Genesis 1:27 – *God created humans in his image, in the image of God God created them.* Isaiah reminds us that we are to be careful, very careful, with how we treat God’s creation. And Isaiah reminds us that our words have power. Our words have the power to lift up or tear down. Our words have the power to create communities of love and forgiveness or to tear down and destroy communities. Isaiah reminds us that in it all and through it all everyone we see is a part of God and that our job is one of restoring us all to God through Jesus Christ.

Now it’s Jeremiah’s turn and Jeremiah says, *Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!* At first, I thought this scripture was about me. Truthfully, I’ve always thought this scripture is for clergy; those of us who preach. Jeremiah has been one of those prophets who scare me because I can just hear him saying, *Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!* And I can almost see him giving me the eye. It’s like my coming home and my mother is waiting at the door for me because she knows I’ve been off making mischief.

Jeremiah has a word for us pastors. It’s a word of warning to let us know that what we *preach* matters. It’s a word of warning to let us know that what we *teach* matters. It’s a word of warning to let us know that that how we *lead* matters. Jeremiah lets us know that as the people God has called to read and interpret scripture for God’s people, God has a warning just for us. We are called to lead God’s people back to God...and we need to do it right.

God calls preachers and teachers of the gospel to lead in love; God’s love as revealed to us in Christ Jesus. God calls preachers and teachers to be bearers of grace, mercy, compassion, and peace.

And woe to the shepherds who call God’s people with visions of an easy life. We’ve heard from the prophets Haggai, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Not a single one of the prophets had an easy life. None of the prophets preached and prophesied an easy life. In fact, the prophets lived in war torn areas; their people were either in captivity or expelled off their land, and their situations looked hopeless. Haggai, Isaiah, and Jeremiah looked at the past and their right now to give their people a look at the future as God would have it.

Jeremiah goes on to say, *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.* Jeremiah tells us the days are coming when “The Lord is Our Righteousness” will reign over us, when judgments from God will come, when we will be faithful to God’s call for us to see everyone as the image of God, and when Jesus the Christ will judge all God’s people with care and compassion.

“The Lord is Our Righteousness” has come and taught us all that God wants us to love God and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. This Reign of Christ Sunday, we are called to listen to the prophets say that

someone is coming, someone who will teach us who we are to be as pastors, teachers, and leaders. Jeremiah warns us...all of us.

Jeremiah's warning is indeed for clergy who stand in front of a congregation. And Jeremiah's warning is for each of us who follow Jesus because when we say we follow Jesus, we become shepherds to and for everyone around us. We are called to love, serve, forgive, and restore like Jesus.

This Reign of Christ Sunday, let us hear the prophets with a fresh ear. Let us look as Haggai taught is with our feet in the past, present, and future. Knowing that *we* are the church. Let us see like Isaiah taught us, with our eyes on God as we acknowledge that everyone we see is made in God's image; knowing that we are to restore everyone we meet to a relationship with God. And finally, let us remember, as Jeremiah taught us, that God has called us to love, serve, forgive, and restore like Jesus.

Response to the Word: *Lift Him up, lift Him up, lift the savior up, still He speaks from eternity: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Me."* Gracious God, may we forever be found lifting up the sheep of your pastures. ***Amen.***