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Reign of Christ

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.

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• **Lectionary Readings (Year C)**

Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Jeremiah 23:1-6
Second Reading	Colossians 1:11-20
Gospel	Luke 23:33-43
Psalm	Luke 1:68-79 or Psalm 46

Jeremiah 23:1-6

1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the
2 LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who
3 shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them
4 away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings,
5 says the LORD. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands
6 where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be
7 fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them,
8 and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the
9 LORD.

10 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous
11 Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and
12 righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.
13 And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

1. First, let's explore Jeremiah's image of the LORD, owner of the land and the sheep; the shepherds; and the sheep.

If you were the owner of so many sheep that you wanted to hire shepherds to take care of them, what duties or demands would you include in your job description? List at least three of them below.

In turn, what might you offer the shepherds?

Your goal for the *flock* is:

Now imagine that you are a shepherd for hire. Why might you agree to the terms outlined above and undertake to care for this lord's flock?

Why might you, the shepherd, destroy and scatter the flock?

How about the sheep in this picture? What are their needs? What may they be experiencing under the care of these shepherds? How may they feel about their flock's being *destroyed, scattered, driven away, and not attended to*?

How does it affect the *flock* to be *scattered* and unattended? How does it affect the owner when his sheep are scattered and unattended? What might be the cost to the shepherds themselves of letting the flock be scattered and not attending to its needs, and even driving the sheep away?

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2. Jeremiah quickly moves on from his pastoral image to the human situation in Judah.

Now, who owns the land and sheep (i.e., the people)? Perhaps after taking a look at our Critical Background, name some of the shepherd (i.e., the kings) and tell how they have injured their flock. Just how might you say that these kings have

scattered [the] flock?

driven them away?

not attended to them?

What, instead, were the shepherd-kings supposed to do for their sheep-people?

In what ways might they expect that the Lord will attend to the shepherd-kings for their evil doings?

Now, who will be in charge of these people? What steps will the Lord will take to restore the people?

to _____

then, _____

and _____

so that _____;

and finally _____.

Why do you imagine that the Lord himself has driven the people out into foreign lands? How might this be a step toward restoring his flock? How then will the people be brought back to their fold? Where or what is the fold in which the sheep-people may be *fruitful and multiply*? What conditions will lead to this prosperous outcome?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs
Jeremiah 23:1-6 • November 21, 2010

Who on earth could be the new shepherds or shepherd-king that will save Judah and let Israel live in safety? List the elements of this promised one's way of caring for his sheep-people:

3. How may we see the need for this kind of judgment and restoration as we approach the end of 2010?

Using Jeremiah's metaphor, whom may we identify as the scattered, imperiled flock of sheep? Who seem to you to take the role of the shepherd-kings who *destroy and scatter* the sheep? What does this destruction and scattering actually look like on the evening news, at your city hall, in the morning newspaper, or at your dinner table?

How may the behavior of these shepherd-kings have affected your own life? How may the behavior of the other sheep in your flock have affected you or those you love? How may you *fear or be dismayed* in this November of 2010?

What promise of hope can you sense—hope for restored unity and fruitfulness, *justice and righteousness*? What might *justice and righteousness* look like in your country?

in your state?

in your town or city?

in your church?

in your family?

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4. How may we recognize this story in our own lives?

Where within you could be one who, perhaps from neglect or greed, perhaps from anger or depression, may have put some part of your inner life at risk? How would you name that one? In the space below, doodle a little picture of him or her.

What do you know of some part of you that, like the sheep in the metaphor, has been scattered, driven away, not attended to by the one you named above? What do you feel toward this uncared-for part of you? How might you name it? For this part of you, what might constitute safety like that of the sheep fold? Can you draw a little picture here of what it might be like to return to the fold?

Where in your life might you find the Lord who will bring things back together to establish righteousness, justice, and safety? What name can you give this Lord? How might your life look under the rule of the king who shall deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness?

Reading Between the Lines

Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock...

Caroline helps us raise the painful question in our inner world about the “God” within who allows our inner “shepherds” to scatter the “flock.” Is it not a question of how our energies and complexes have driven us into dark and often bruising places where we hide out and tremble for years? The challenge, as Jeremiah tells us, is to “gather the remnant” and bring them home. But in the meantime what purpose has been served by the scattering? What do we know of places in the geography of the world (and of the psyche) where we have suffered the price of coming of age, growing up, and becoming wounded but whole people? Ask yourself where you have scattered yourself and what—rather than why—you have learned. What is the ancient prophet Jeremiah telling you about your twenty-first century journey toward your Self?

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Have you ever had an encounter with a sheep? Have you ever met a shepherd? Do you know anything about them outside of the images that you read in the Bible? For contemporary people, the metaphor of sheep and shepherd has become mostly theoretical, while for Jeremiah’s audience it was commonplace and familiar. The *shepherd* leading his *flock* is a familiar image in church life, but it is not one for which we have a current referent. Rather, it is a back-formation—the use of a religious metaphor to describe a present experience.

What other metaphor that comes from your daily experiences—in your business, your church, your family, our nation—might you suggest for *shepherds* and *flocks*, for *pastures* and *folds*? What needs to be said about the expectations and actions of the leaders? Of those who are being led? What relationships are there between the two? What does using a different metaphor add to your reflection on this interrelationship? What does it lose?

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The prophet Jeremiah lived when his country was under control of Babylon. Judah had its own government, but could do only what Babylon allowed. Many of the leaders tried to get King Zedekiah to rebel against Babylon. He gave in to their demands and Jerusalem wound up destroyed. Jeremiah speaks to the leaders who encouraged rebellion as *shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture*. Woe to them. But Jeremiah holds out hope for the people, saying God will raise up a new king. Justice and righteousness will come to the land, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. Now the stage is set for hoping and waiting for a new king. *The Lord is our righteousness*. This Sunday is the last one in the church year before the beginning of Advent—the anticipation of the new king. As Advent approaches, spend some time reflecting on Jeremiah’s words of warning and words of hope. How might you prepare for the new king in your own life?

Gail Rogers

Parallel Readings

From *Cleveland.com*

Agencies Deliberately Inflated Ratings of Toxic Assets, Senate Panel Says

A Senate panel investigating the causes of the nation's financial crisis on Thursday unveiled evidence that credit-rating agencies knowingly gave inflated ratings to complex deals backed by shaky U.S. mortgages because of the fees they earned for giving such investment-grade ratings..

The Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations will hold a detailed hearing on Friday, where its chairman, Sen. Carl Levin, will introduce e-mail records in which executives from Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service acknowledge compromising the integrity of ratings in order to win business from big Wall Street firms.

"They did it for the big fees they got," Levin, a Michigan Democrat, told reporters on Thursday after outlining the broad strokes of what he'd pursue Friday, when he puts current and former ratings agency officials on the hot seat.

The documents to be released Friday confirm what a McClatchy Newspapers investigation revealed in October—that pressure from top ratings-agency executives to retain market share and the fees that brought meant that ratings on complex deals were malleable. Some fees were as high as \$1.4 million.

The agencies rate the quality of financial products such as bonds and serve as guides trusted by investors. Many bonds they rated as top-quality in the recent crisis turned out to be junk. The fallout from their rollover to Wall Street's financial firms was a housing collapse that triggered a global financial crisis.

In one example obtained by the committee, a Moody's employee, sent an e-mail to a banker at Merrill Lynch in June 2007, pressuring the investment bank to lock down a big fee in exchange for a positive rating.

"We have spent significant amount of resource on this deal, and it will be difficult for us to continue with this process if we do not have an agreement on the fee issue," said the Moody's employee. Merrill Lynch acquiesced, but not without conditions.

"We are okay with the revised fee schedule for this transaction. We are agreeing to this under the assumption that this will not be a precedent for any future deals and that you will work with us further on this transaction to try to get to some

Kevin G. Hall and Chris Adams, "Agencies deliberately inflated ratings of toxic asstes, Senate panel says," McClatchy Newspapers, April 22, 2010, copyright © 2010 cleveland.com. All rights reserved.

middle ground with respect to the ratings,” the Merrill Lynch employee said, leaning on Moody’s.

In another e-mail obtained from Standard & Poor’s, an employee complains of the shifting criteria used in models for rating complex deals.

“Screwing with (the model’s) criteria to ‘get the deal’ is putting the entire S&P franchise at risk—it’s a bad idea,” said the employee.

Last year’s McClatchy Newspapers investigation revealed how top management at Moody’s pressured analysts to find ways to get deals done to prevent the business from going to a competitor. The practice was not exclusive to Moody’s.

Another e-mail to be unveiled by Levin’s subcommittee features a Standard & Poor’s employee angrily complaining to a Morgan Stanley banker about ratings agencies being played off each other.

“How many millions does Morgan Stanley pay us in the greater scheme of things? How many times have I accommodated you on tight deals? Neer, Hill, Yoo, Garzia, Nager, May, Miteva, Benson, Erdman all think I am helpful, no?” the employee said, naming all the Morgan executives who had received accommodative ratings.

Friday’s hearing will feature current and former executives from both major ratings agencies who worked on the complex deals called collateralized debt obligations. CDOs involve giant pools of U.S. mortgages packaged together for sale to investors as a complex security with high risks and high reward. Wall Street’s pooling and packaging of loans did not involve due diligence on the underlying quality of the loans.

Because underwriting standards by mortgage lenders had dropped precipitously, many of these complex deals given top investment-grade ratings went bust within months in 2007.

That alone is evidence of the industry’s falling standards. Prior to these problems, the mathematical chances of a default on a top investment grade rating were less than 1 percent. What changed is that structured finance became popular—the practice of pooling together loans and offering slices to investors at different risk levels.

Kevin G. Hall and
Chris Adams

From *Running with Scissors*

My mother only wears fancy shoes when she’s going out, so I’ve come to associate them with a feeling of abandonment and dread.

I don’t want her to go. My umbilical cord is still attached and she’s pulling at it. I feel panicky.

Augusten Burroughs, *Running with Scissors: A Memoir*,
(New York: Picador, 2002),
p. 2.

I'm standing in the bathroom next to her because I need to be with her for as long as I can. Maybe she is going to Hartford, Connecticut. Or Bradley Field International Airport.

Augusten Burroughs

From *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow*

The work was boring, but whenever I had a chance to take a break, I would amuse myself by going down to the Interior Department library and thumbing through anything I could find about Alaska.

One thing the government did well was keep records, and I found them extremely enlightening. One day, for example, I ran across the verbatim transcript of a hearing conducted in the 1940s in Kobuk, up the river from Kotzebue. To protect their traditional lands from gold miners and other speculators, the villagers had tried to establish a reservation.

It was painful to read the transcript. At risk were six hundred square miles on which the Inupiat on the Kobuk had eked out a living for millennia. They simply wanted to be left alone to pursue their livelihood as their forefathers had. But it was clear that the Inupiat barely understood English, and they failed to argue their case persuasively. By contrast, their opponents—the miners and speculators who wanted access to the land—testified eloquently about the evils of reservations in the Lower Forty-eight and argued forcefully against establishing similar outposts here. How could the Native peoples win when they did not truly comprehend the system they were dealing with, or the power of those who fully understood the value of the riches that lay under the ground?

I was beginning to understand a most important point: our people had no champions. . . .

My mission was clear to me: to try to motivate people to take on the state, the federal government, and anybody else who tried to take our land. The big question was whether anyone would pay attention to me. . . .

Back in Fairbanks, I began planning a June meeting in Kotzebue. I prevailed on the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide financial support so that representatives from surrounding villages could attend. Bowman Hinckley, who worked for the Bureau of Land Management in Fairbanks, had been a treasure trove of information for me during my research on land rights; he got permission to attend to explain BLM regulations on land title. The BIA agreed to send a representative from Juneau. And when, on June 10, 1966, we held our first informational meeting at the BIA school in Kotzebue, about seventy-five people showed up. Delegates came from all over the region—from Ambler, Noatak, Kiana, Kivalina, and Kotzebue.

William L. Iggiagruk Hensley, *Fifty Miles from Tomorrow: A Memoir of Alaska and the Real People*, (New York: Picador, 2009), pp. 106, 118, 121-122.

We translated our proceedings into Inupiaq. First, I laid out the situation that faced us as simply as I could. Then, for about four hours, the delegates discussed the matter. Finally, I asked those assembled what we should do about our traditional land. Almost in unison, they cried out, "Claim it!"

I took a big black pen. On a simple Kroll map of Alaska, I drew a circle encompassing about 30 million acres—all the areas that drained into Kotzebue Sound. "Okay, here is our claim on behalf of our thirteen villages," I declared. Then I drafted a letter on behalf of the Northwest Alaska Native Association, which we formed expressly for this purpose, and signed it, along with everyone else who had participated in the meeting.

When it was over, I breathed a sigh of relief. At least for the moment, the state and federal governments were on notice. We had put our stake in the ground. If any entity, private or public, wanted land in our region, they would now have to deal with the claimants on petition number 035294: the Inupiat people of the Kotzebue region.

William L. Iggiagruk Hensley

Critical Background

From *Understanding the Old Testament*

Jehoiakim could afford to display contempt for Jeremiah's scroll, because there seemed to be no immediate threat to the security of his throne. The Babylonian king, Nabopolassar, had died shortly after the battle of Carchemish, and Nebuchadrezzar, the crown prince who had led the army to victory, returned to Babylon to assume the throne. About the year 601 B.C., his army swept through Palestine to the border of Egypt—an invasion that evoked some of Jeremiah's poems on the foe from the north. In the battle against Egypt, heavy casualties were suffered by both sides, and Nebuchadrezzar's crippled army had to return to Babylonia. The defeat of Babylonia and the weakness of Egypt gave Jehoiakim the opportunity he had been waiting for. About 600 B.C., he made a reckless bid for independence by withholding tribute to Babylonia. This rebellion was an invitation to Nebuchadrezzar to strike. (II Kings 24:1-7)

The Good and Bad Figs

Because Nebuchadrezzar was unable to attend to Judah immediately, he first incited raiders from neighboring peoples to devastate the land. During these disturbances Jehoiakim died, leaving his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, to pay the penalty for his father's political folly. The Deuteronomic historian, in typical fashion, charges Jehoiachin with doing evil as his father had done, despite the fact that his short reign hardly gave him a chance to do much of anything. In 598-597 B.C., Nebuchadrezzar mobilized his army for a full-scale invasion of Judah, and Jehoiachin, after only three months on the throne, was forced to capitulate. The Temple and royal treasuries were emptied, and the young king and his queen mother were taken prisoners to Babylonia. Into exile with the king went the leading figures of Judah, including, as we shall see, a prophet named Ezekiel. Thus began the first chapter in the Babylonian Exile (II Kings 24:10-17).

Nebuchadrezzar now placed Josiah's youngest son, Mattaniah, on the throne of Judah, changing his name to Zedekiah. Under this king, the last member of the Davidic dynasty to rule in Judah, Jeremiah spent the rest of his prophetic career in Jerusalem. A good deal of the material in chapters 1-25, especially chapters 21-24, comes from Zedekiah's reign (597-587 B.C.), as does most of the material in Baruch's Memoirs found in chapters 26-45.

Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), pp. 384-386.

In contrast to the despotic Jehoiakim, Zedekiah was mild and benevolent. But he was a weak and vacillating ruler, easily swayed by the advice of those around him. Although the new situation gave the princes a chance to control public policy in their own selfish interests, it also presented Jeremiah with a golden opportunity. Now that the tyrant was dead and a more benevolent regime had been inaugurated, the prophet could appear in public with new prestige, for his prophecies had been confirmed by history. On several occasions, Zedekiah sought the prophet's counsel behind closed doors, and evidently would have liked to follow it had he been more courageous. One can feel sympathetic toward Zedekiah and wish that he had appeared in a quieter period of Judah's history. Notice that Jeremiah's oracles against the royal house (22:1-23:6) did not include Zedekiah among the kings denounced for oppression and injustice. Rather, by a play on words, Jeremiah may have found in the name of Zedekiah (which in Hebrew means "Yahweh is my righteousness") the suggestion that the messianic king of the future would have a similar royal name: "Yahweh is our righteousness" (33:16).

Bereft of her first citizens, Judah was only a shadow of her former self. The cream of the leadership—the nobility, the artisans, the highest military ranks—had been shipped off to Babylonia. The nation was crippled—at the very time when the need for resourceful leadership and stable traditions was greatest. Into this vacuum moved a new nobility, ill-equipped for the heavy responsibilities of the hour and even less capable of perceiving the religious meaning of the crisis. Governed by short-sighted nationalism and swayed by the emotional appeal of prophetic demagogues, these new leaders hastened the downfall of the nation (compare Ezekiel 11). Jeremiah saw no hope in people of such poor grade!

Bernhard W. Anderson

From *The Hebrew Bible*

The account of the history of Judah from Hezekiah to Zedekiah has attained an "iconic," even "canonical" form, interpreted and embellished by DH [The Deuteronomistic History] and the prophets. It appears as the fatal consequence of religious apostasy and an oppressive social order. It is difficult to assess the events soberly and concretely in terms of the range of options open to the people and leaders of Judah and the constellation of factors at work in one direction or another.

Narrow limits hedged the path of any hierarchic state in the ancient Near East, especially a small one facing imperial powers. In the midst of the political power plays of the time, there lay a troublesome contradiction in the interplay between national self-assertion and national subservience. Self-

Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible—A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 372-373.

Recollections and surviving aspects of the tribal social organization nonetheless had their effect within the monarchic culture and religion and set off far-reaching political reverberations.

assertion, entailing revolt against foreign imperialists invited reprisal and destruction, and the danger of political extinction. On the other hand, acquiescence led to the diminution of the distinctive national culture and religion, if not because of foreign demand or overt pressure, nevertheless through the fascination and advantage of the ways of a superior power in the eyes of aspiring Israelite and Judahite elites.

If the continuation and cultivation of Israelite identity and national self-determination was the goal, then it is difficult to say that any other course of state foreign policy would have led to securer results. It was a precarious position for any self-determining state to be located in the strategic corridor between Assyria/Neo-Babylonia and Egypt. When the problem is formulated within the terms of the hierarchic state system, we can perhaps say that Judah did as well, perhaps much better, than other small states at the time.

The reality was, however, that in their historic pasts Israel and Judah had known another kind of social organizational experience which informed their peoples and came to expression in the Yahwism of the Elohist, DH, and the prophets. Israel had once been a *tribally organized confederacy* with approximate equality for all its members. That confederacy had neither the power nor the will to enter into international politics in the way that rival states did. Under David, Israel crossed over into the institutional and symbolic terrain of the state and never voluntarily returned from it.

Recollections and surviving aspects of the tribal social organization nonetheless had their effect within the monarchic culture and religion and set off far-reaching political reverberations. Only in terms of the tribal social organizational base can E [The Elohist], DH, and the prophets, together with the social constituencies they represented, be at all understood. In their indirect religious symbolic way, these "critical traditionalists" were reminding Israel that the charter of Israel's existence had been social equality and that, by endangering social equality to become a state, the basis of Israelite strength and its difference from other Near Eastern peoples were jeopardized.

Norman K. Gottwald