



still waters

home church studies

Jeremiah 23.1-6 [Worship]

1 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."

Consider:

God contradicts the world's self-destructiveness. Jeremiah's poem lays out the coming trouble in verses 1-2. Beyond the trouble, God will gather to homecoming and will raise up shepherds who will make the community safe.

In Luke 1, Zechariah sings of the new rule of God in Jesus. Twice he affirms God's gift of mercy: "God has shown mercy" (vs 72) and "By the tender mercies of our God" (verse 78). That mercy comes as forgiveness whereby the world is restored to healthy possibility and to life with God. Paul's lyrical affirmation in Colossians is the news that we

are "transferred" to a new governance (verse 13), have forgiveness (vs 14), and "have peace" through the self-giving of God (vs 20).

The gospel narrative in Luke 23 features Jesus on the cross, about to be executed by the empire as an enemy of the state. He is mocked by his executioners; he is derided by one of his fellow inmates. In an extraordinary act of contradiction, Jesus responds with forgiveness. Jesus responds to his fellow inmate by a promise of paradise in time to come. Jesus refuses the rules of the empire. He breaks the vicious cycles of violence, making new life possible. In him we have the new shepherd of Jeremiah, the mercy of Zechariah, and reconciliation of Paul—all come to effective visibility. The world is now the new venue of tender mercy that nullifies the force of death among us.

—Walter Bruggemann

[Scripture]

Luke 1.68-79

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. 72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. 78 By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Question: As the promised change agent of antiquity, Jesus fulfilled the prophet's rightful understanding of the mercies of God toward all creation, and reconciliation to His image bearers.

If we believe Him so much, why do we not look very much like this Promised One in our interactions with each other, and the world He loves?

Reread Luke 23.33-43