

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, November 20, 2016

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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."

Luke 1:68-79

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who

hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Let us pray...Amen.

The church calendar calls this day, The Reign of Christ Sunday. Most of our liturgical brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church and the Lutheran and Episcopal Church consider it a feast day. It is considered the last Sunday of the church year, sort of the church's New Year's Eve. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of the church year, sort of like New Year's Day. I find it interesting that the church considers the first Sunday in Advent, the first day of waiting for the Christ Child as the first Sunday in a new

church year. You'd think Christmas would be a better day to start the new church year, but the wise early church leaders decided that Advent, the waiting for the Christ Child, would be a suitable beginning.

John and Jesus were cousins, their mothers were sisters. Some families are close. So close, the cousins seem like siblings. Anybody know a family like that? In reading about John and Jesus, and their families, it seems to me that they might have been a close family. And John and Jesus were might have been raised in such a way that they would be more like brothers than cousins.

Are there any first-born siblings here today? There is a growing body of psychological research on the power of our birth order. First-born children have some common characteristics, second-born, the same, along with middle children, and so on.

Firstborn

As the leader of the pack, firstborns often tend to be:

- Reliable
- Conscientious
- Structured
- Cautious
- Controlling
- Achievers

Firstborns bask in their parents' presence, which may explain why they sometimes act like mini-adults. Firstborns are diligent and want to be the best at everything

Middle Child

"The middle child often feels left out and a sense of, 'Well, I'm not the oldest. I'm not the youngest. Who am I?'" This sort of floundering leads

middle children to make their mark among their peers, since parental attention is usually devoted to the beloved firstborn or baby of the family.

In general, middle children tend to possess the following characteristics:

- People-pleasers
- Somewhat rebellious
- Thrive on friendships
- Has large social circle
- Peacemakers

Isn't it interesting that John and Jesus seem to fit some of the patterns modern psychology has determined are common as a result of birth order?

John came first. He must have discovered fairly early on though, that his job was to prepare the way for his cousin. He was not the one. He was not the Messiah, his cousin Jesus was.

I'm a first-born. I was the first to get in serious trouble, the first to drive, the first to do a lot of things. As I grew up, one of the things I heard from my parents was that even though I had my driver's license, I would never get the car to drive to school. So, I took the bus.

But when I went to college, imagine my surprise when my brother wrote me a letter telling me that he had the 69 Mustang to drive to school his senior year!

I was the first to try out for sports. My first sport was cross-country running, and when my brother became a freshman in high school, his first sport was cross-country.

My second sport was swimming. When my brother chose a second sport, it was swimming!

My third sport was track and field, and my brother's choice? You guessed it, track and field!

Now, who knows if we chose the same sports because we shared those interests already, or if he chose those sports because I was already on the team, and could introduce him to the teammates I already knew.

The one who goes first, prepares the way for those who follow.

By the time John was an adult, he knew full well what his role would be in bringing the Messiah to the attention of the world. He stood out as a little weird, in the wilderness, preaching about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. But somehow, he must have reconciled that he was not the one, he would not be the Messiah.

He was the one who was meant to prepare the way for the Messiah. And he did a good job. He preached from his heart. He showed people the way. And he ultimately gave his life for his belief in Jesus.

We all have a little John the Baptist in us. We may not all be first-born in our families, but in the Christian family, we too have a job of preparing the way for the Messiah.

On the Advent of Thanksgiving, we can be thankful for the role Christ plays in our lives, and for the role we play in sharing Christ with the world.

Today, we are the ones meant to prepare the way for the Messiah. And we'll need to do a good job. We'll have to speak from our hearts, and show people the way. Ultimately, we'll be called to give our lives for our belief in Jesus. Thankfully, not in the way John did! (And if you don't know how he lost his life, wait a little bit before you look it up).

Next week begins a new church year, but for now, we remember that Christ is King, and that his reign lasts forever. He doesn't fit the mold of a traditional king, and of course, that's what got him in trouble. He is a peacemaker, a forgiver, a supporter, and one who loves unconditionally. He exercises his power for healing, not for fighting, his miracles point to the power of the kingdom of heaven, and the grace of God.

No matter what our birth order, it's important to remember that in the Christian family, our task is to prepare the way, like our brother John the Baptist did.

And that's no small task: if we take the list from the gospel according to Luke,

*for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.*

*By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

Next week, we will begin our waiting for the Christ Child in earnest. We will reflect on what his arrival will mean for a world desperate for peace, a world aching for forgiveness, a world fearful for the future.

In our practice of Thanksgiving, this week, and every week, let us remember to be thankful for what Christ has done for us, what Christ does for us today, and what Christ will do for us in the eternal life.

And then, in doing so, let us prepare the way for the Lord to come into this world welcomed and appreciated, wanted and loved. Amen.