

Reign Of Christ Sunday – Vanessa Perkinson

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

War, corrupt judges and shepherds, natural disasters, stealing, evil doings, destruction—these are the types of catastrophes we read of in our passages this morning. The sad reality is that I could have used those same examples to describe the world we live in today. From wildfires and climate change to political corruption, even to the pain the faculty, staff, and students of Greenville University are enduring with the recent cuts that have been made. The truth, unfortunately, is that the broken world we live in is the same broken world of the Bible. Different people and different constructs, but still just as broken as it's always been. I know this seems like a bleak account, and in fact it is, but today's readings don't just speak of this; they also offer a promise in the midst of the sin and suffering. Not only do they bring us to the conclusion that we live in a fragmented world, but they also point to the truth that Christ is our hope in every kind of calamity.

In the first few verses of the 23rd chapter of Jeremiah, it is evident that God's people have been wronged. Those shepherds whom God has raised up to look over His people have done the exact opposite of that. Verses 1 and 2 paint a clear picture of shepherds who, instead of keeping God's chosen together, have scattered them and neglected to attend to them, and God is angry. In response He promises justice. Not only does He make it clear that He will *attend to [their] evil doings* but He promises to gather His people and be the shepherd that they so desperately need. God proclaims that He will raise up a Righteous Branch as King who will reign with righteousness and justice. Even in the midst of their suffering under a lack of good leadership, God promises to shepherd them. How many of us can say that at one time or another, we have suffered because of lack of good leadership? I know I can attest to this. Whether it be in a church setting, in the work place, or somewhere else, unfortunately living in a broken world also means serving under broken leadership. But even still, God is promising Jesus as our Shepherd.

Psalm 46 speaks of a different kind of suffering. The Psalmist gives us an image of a world that is literally crumbling; mountains shaking and trembling, waters roaring and foaming. Further down we read of wars, nations being in uproar, kingdoms that are unstable and tottering. I know I mentioned this earlier, but it never ceases to amaze me how little the world has changed. How many times in the last year have headlines warned us that our earth is dying, or of natural disasters stealing homes and lives? Mass fires burning up our earth, earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding that threatens the lives of both humans and wildlife. And of course, all we have to do is turn on the news to hear of dissension between nations and how humans are at odds with one another all over the world. And yet Psalm 46 opens with the proclamation that *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ... God is in the midst ... God will help, ... the Lord of hosts is with us!* And He tells us to *Be still and know that [He] is God.* That phrase “be still” literally means to take your hands off and relax. How easy it is for us to try to solve problems that only God is equipped to handle. Of course, there is a time to act but there is also a time to take our hands off of a situation and let God be our refuge, our safe place in the midst of destruction and danger.

In our reading of Luke, we see the fulfillment of God's promise all the way back in Jeremiah. The Righteous Branch has come in the form of Jesus Christ. But this is not the way we would expect God to save the world. What is described in Luke is not an angry God striking the Earth but instead a humble Savior, hanging on a tree, being mocked and humiliated for us. Even as Jesus is on the cross suffering for sins He did not commit, the thief next to Him recognizes that Jesus is the Messiah and acknowledges that while he himself has every right to be on that cross, Jesus has done nothing wrong. In a moment of faith, the thief humbly yet boldly asks that Jesus remember him, and Jesus, in all His grace and mercy and love, promises that they will be together in Paradise. You see, even in our sin, Christ is there with us acting as our salvation from sin that we on our own can't overcome or escape.

What I hope we're all getting from these passages is what I said at the beginning of this message—that Christ is our hope in every kind of calamity. As we have seen this morning, it is all over the Bible, these stories of suffering and destruction and sin—and yet in each one, the living Christ is offered as our shepherd, our refuge, and our Savior. Yes, it is true that the world is the same kind of broken it has always been, but we also have the hope of Christ that has been promised to us since the Fall. And in light of that may we not fear or be dismayed, may we be still and know that He is God. As Colossians 1 says, *May [we] be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may [we] be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.* And as we stand on this hope for ourselves, may we look for ways in which God is using us to be shepherds that properly attend to His people and to a world in need.