

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Aug 17th 2016

Ezekiel found himself in a time of dire circumstances. Under the cruel monarch Nebuchadnezzar, he and his fellow countrymen had been forcefully taken from their homes in Israel to captivity in Babylon. Ezekiel's world had literally fallen apart.

Does that sound much different from our world today? While we have not been carried off into captivity, our safety and security have certainly been severely impacted. As in Ezekiel's time, there are many in our midst claiming to have the answer. Yet many of those answers fail to make a difference in the lives of the weak, the sick, the injured, and the lost. So many of those modern day "shepherds" seem to be more interested in themselves than in those they claim to want to help.

God laid out severe consequences for "shepherds" who chose to lead people away from Him. He also described frightening consequences for His people who chose to follow these false shepherds. That scene certainly tends to play out in my life today. When I fail to keep my eye on Jesus and follow the world's idea of life, I too end up facing unpleasant, and at times even dire consequences.

But what I find even more convicting is the realization that God has called me to be a shepherd, not just to be content in my role as one of His sheep. Ezekiel's story is not intended to point out that all those attempting to lead are evil, but rather only those trying to lead outside God's example. Caring for the weak, the sick, the injured, and the lost are what Jesus was all about. The crucial directive to "feed my sheep" was Jesus' response to Peter if he truly loved Jesus (John 21). It seems pretty clear that my love for Jesus requires nothing less than for me to become a shepherd.

Yet I continually fail in living my life as a shepherd - pointing others to Christ. Life just seems so overwhelming at times. Jesus understands this quandary and provided the clear answer in Psalm 23. He is ALWAYS at our side. He is the good shepherd that will never abandon us, even in life's worst challenges. He refreshes our soul, guiding us, and comforting us. It is such an amazing fact that the God of the universe would shower us with His presence, giving us the courage and confidence to face all that this world throws at us.

We need not be concerned about all the times we have messed up in the past - all the opportunities when I should have said or done something to help those around me but failed to act. Jesus knew of that concern as well. In His parable of the "workers in the vineyard", (Mt 20) Jesus makes it perfectly clear that it is never too late to come to Him, to share in the overwhelming joy of His everlasting presence.

Jesus is with us and will never leave us. He has provided us with the perfect example of how we should live our life in His love: allowing His living water to flow through us while pointing others to Christ. With the assurance of His presence, we can boldly choose to live each day for and with Jesus.

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