

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 11 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

ACNA Readings – Isaiah 57:14-21; Psalm 22:23-31; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-44

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). However, throughout the year there are also smaller feasts. Mark 6:14-29 spoke of the death of John the Baptist by King Herod but this week the western Church also remembers the death of St. James, son of Zebedee, as he was martyred by King Herod (Acts 12:1-2). The growth of the Church occurs even in persecution when the Church submits itself to the eternal king and continues to serve even in the face of death.

Common Theme. God provides even where others can't, or refuse, to provide. Depending on kings and organizations to provide for the good of the people will, eventually, lead to disappointment. Not all kings are evil or selfish, there have been plenty of examples of great leaders throughout history that have had compassion and the ability to provide, in fact, we too should strive to lead with compassion and provide for the hungry and needy. However, people fail—we die, we change, we make poor choices, and we can choose to serve our own needs first. God has never ceased to provide rain and food since the formation of the world. And in a world so often divided and broken, God can provide for both us and our enemies—even bringing us to peace with Him and with each other.

Hebraic Context. Shepherding was both a familial and technical job. It was also a job associated with mighty men and great kings. For millennia the ancient profession of the shepherd was thought of quite highly and became a major metaphor for the characteristic of leadership.² All the patriarchs of the Jewish people were shepherds,³ from Abraham to Moses and David.⁴ There is something about shepherding that produces good biblical leaders.

Before the advent of coinage, wealth was measured in usable goods and services, which included livestock.⁵ Owning large herds of animals indicated you were a rich person and displayed your importance to the community. The community itself was often centred around the

¹ Alternative RCL Readings: II Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 14

² Many kings, mythological figures, and even gods were known to be shepherds. Abraham and Jacob along with Moses and David were extremely talented shepherds in the Bible. But II Kings 3:4 also speaks of Mesha, the king of Moab, being a successful shepherd. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu is taught to be civilized by the shepherds he met on his journey.

³ When Joseph's brothers were presented before Pharaoh and he asked them of their occupation they responded "We are shepherds like our fathers before us" (Genesis 47:3).

⁴ Exodus Rabbah 2.2 speaks of the skill David used in shepherding the flock. Psalm 78:72 says that David "guided them with his skillful hand." The midrash explains that David would first take the littlest lambs to graze and then the oldest to graze, keeping the strongest and most choice lambs back until the weak and elderly had their fill.

⁵ Coins as a source of trading power largely developed in the Persian period, so quite late in history.

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extended family with the patriarch acting as leader and decision maker. This also tended to lead shepherds towards a nomadic lifestyle where the leader of the clan, the owner of the flocks, would move his encampment from water source to water source and from grazed pastures to fresh pastures because that was the best thing for his flock.

A good shepherd could feed many sheep with minimal resources while a bad shepherd could easily destroy even plentiful resources if they didn't watch their sheep and take care of them.⁶ God promised that He would personally feed His sheep, heal them, and give them justice. God is the greatest shepherd. As we shall see from Psalm 23, if God is our shepherd, we shall not want. However, just because God could feed 5,000 and more people with only a few fish and loaves of bread and heal the multitudes while we often can't doesn't mean that we shouldn't have compassion as He did. It takes skill and effort to be good shepherds but we have the best example to learn from.

Jeremiah 23:1-6. Jeremiah 23 starts with a declaration of woe against the unfaithful shepherds who were to care for God's people.⁷ In the ancient world the leadership (be they royalty, monarchs, or the priestly class) were often referred to as shepherds. In this context, the shepherds were both ruling elites and the spiritual leadership of the community who had failed to 'feed' the people of Israel.⁸ Monarchs were also expected to lead the spiritual welfare of their subjects. Instead, so many of Israel and Judah's kings and judges led the people astray into idolatry and immorality.

Jeremiah chastised the shepherds for 'scattering' the flock. Physically this refers to the literal captivity under the Babylonians and spiritually to the descent into idol worship that brought on the exile. The redress against the shepherds would be coming and it was personal, as the Lord Himself would hold them to account as He said, "I will attend to you for your evil deeds." It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

⁶ Biblical shepherds generally lived on the edge of society as farmers did not want cattle and sheep eating their crops (although, during the hottest months in Israel after the harvests, sheep would be welcomed to feed on the stubble and fertilize the fields). In Judah, the edge of society was a wilderness. And so shepherds had to be knowledgeable about where to obtain food and water where there was no food or water, who to make alliances with, and when to move the flock. Shepherds had to be warriors who could defend the flock from predators in the wilderness. Shepherds had to be able to guide their sheep, keep them from falling into ravines and keep them away from flash floods (knowing hydrology and meteorology). Shepherds were also the veterinarians for their flock, binding up their wounds, caring for the injured, and expertly helping them through difficult births.

⁷ Jeremiah 22 specifically mentions who many of these shepherds were, the kings of Judah: Shallum (Jehoahaz), Jehoiakim (Eliakim), and Coniah (Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin).

⁸ Ezekiel 34 goes into even greater detail on how a good shepherd should act and compared how the shepherds of Israel were actually acting.

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The Lord looked at the shepherds of Israel and found them wanting, and in taking matters into His own hands He would replace them with Himself. God would reverse everything wrong. Instead of the flock being scattered there would be an ingathering of the remnant. God would appoint new shepherds who would take their tasks and responsibilities seriously. The flock would be fed and offered correct sanctuary with the result being fruitfulness and increase of the flock.

Good leaders and shepherds enable human flourishing. It is in this context of discipline and exile, but also of blessing and restoration that Jeremiah prophesies of the coming redeemer. A good king and shepherd would come from the Davidic line, called the Branch of righteousness.⁹
¹⁰ In good Hebrew parallelism the prophet announces one of the titles of the redeemer king to be “The Lord Our Righteousness” יהוה צדקנו *Adonai Tsidkenu*.

The righteousness of the Lord will be a characteristic of the coming king—the Branch. One of the meanings of the word צדק righteousness is the redemptive saving activity of God. Jeremiah announced the coming Davidic king to have the redemptive qualities of the Lord. The redemption will have both physical and spiritual aspects as real human flourishing involves both.

Psalm 23. Almost every ancient culture had a god and goddess associated with shepherding—it was an incredibly important (and more importantly to the gods, wealthy) job. In his prayer, David reflected on his experience of God. David opened this short psalm by declaring יהוה רעי, the LORD (YHVH) was David's personal shepherd. The equivalent statement, for David, was that (because the LORD was his shepherd) he would never lack.

As a former shepherd himself, David understood well the relationship between sheep and shepherd. Shepherds took care of all the needs of the flock. If God was David's personal shepherd then he knew without a doubt that he would be lacking in nothing. The relationship between other gods and humans did not have this equivalence.¹¹ The Lord's provision went even beyond the physical care to also spiritually restore the soul of David. He wrote of God as both a protector and provider who disciplined His beloved flock.

⁹ The term “Branch of righteousness” צֶמַח צְדִיק is unique to Jeremiah although the word branch צֶמַח is used by other prophets in connection to the divine redemptive messianic future, such as Isaiah 4:2, 11:1, and Zechariah 6:12-13. Jeremiah 33:15 also refers to the Branch of righteousness, someone who will bring both justice and righteousness. Jeremiah 33:17 continues by stating that “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.”

¹⁰ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan makes the connection to the coming redeemer even stronger in its translation, ואקים לדוד משיח דצדיקיא, “And I will raise to David a just Messiah”.

¹¹ Whether as Shepherds or farmers, when the gods had something of great value, such as the golden apples, they would guard them jealously and not share it even with their worshippers.

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Without the shepherd, the psalm implies the sheep will face starvation and danger at the hands of predators.¹² The staff and rod that David mentions in verse 4 are the shepherds' equipment used to defend the flock from wild animals as well as guide the strays and stragglers and lastly to discipline or punish a wayward sheep.

Psalm 23 changes tone half-way through, from statements of truth and comfort to interaction.¹³ Acknowledging God's actions towards us should lead us to come before Him. But another interesting point to note in this psalm is verse 5, in which God provided a table of food in the company of David's enemies.¹⁴ Hospitality and food was a point of honour in the ancient world, as it is in the modern Middle East to this day. Both Jews and Muslims trace the art of hospitality back to Abraham, who entertained the Lord Himself and His angels with hospitality and food.¹⁵

Meal occasions are powerful events where people who disagree with each other can sit and eat together, fellowship, discuss and, perhaps, see something in the other person that they had not noticed before. Perhaps they may even rise from the table no longer as enemies but now as friends. God is gracious and so we too should be gracious in our actions with others. Today the Good Shepherd can still arrange those events for us where an enemy can become a friend. The Shepherd Psalm concludes with David's assurance that he will dwell in the presence of His

¹² Many pictures of Psalm 23 show a beautiful field of fertile green grass where fat, woolly sheep can feed at their ease. In that setting, if there weren't a shepherd the sheep would likely still be fine. Traveling the Judean wilderness, where David would have shepherded his own flock, displays a very different situation. Individual stalks of hardy brown vegetation grow here and there amongst the many rocks on steep hills. These steep hills have what appear to be concentric circles around them that allow a sure-footed animal to get to the limited food. The "paths" spoken of in Psalm 23:3 are actually just the "circles" of righteousness—wandering off these paths could easily lead to death.

Small, muddy pools can occasionally be found by the extremely knowledgeable shepherd. There are also some pools and reeds that might appear inviting, but they are often in ravines where a rainstorm a couple dozen kilometers away and half a day earlier might cause a flash flood. But there are also some times in the year where the wilderness springs up briefly with a beauty that can only be described by seeing life where life should not exist—the good shepherd knows where is safe and what is good for his sheep. There is no way a sheep would survive without a shepherd in these places.

¹³ God feeds us and leads us, but we too act. Psalm 95:7-8 states, "For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness..." When God acts or states something, to not acknowledge or listen to Him is a perilous path to walk.

¹⁴ God's provision "in the presence of my enemies" can be viewed from multiple perspectives. First, it displays God's blessing of those He shepherds. Even when enemies and rivals surround us and fight against us, God proves His faithfulness to both us and our enemies by providing us with not only food, but a feast. But it can also be an attempt at reconciliation.

¹⁵ Genesis 18 has an interesting scene where three men came to Abraham. Two men continued on to Sodom "but Abraham still stood before the LORD". Abraham proceeded to have an argument with God. In Genesis 19, the two men turned out to be angels. While not explicit, many orthodox traditions believe that the third man Abraham entertained may have been a theophany.

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divine shepherd forever. God's love and care is not relegated to this life only but extends into the world to come. The Lord's character as the Good Shepherd is eternal and we enjoy it in this life but also forevermore.

Ephesian 2:11-22. Ephesus contained a synagogue and a mixed group of believers from among the Jews and the Gentiles.¹⁶ But Paul specifically addressed the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11-13. Prior to reconciliation to God through Jesus, the Gentiles were aliens, foreigners, among the people of Israel and strangers to the covenantal promises. They were without hope and had no true knowledge or access to God.

Ephesians 2:1 reminded the Ephesians of their previous spiritual state, they were dead. They may have been religious, following the Greek gods and living in like manner—in pagan spirituality, a hedonistic environment of self gratification and lusts of the flesh. Now, however, they were “saints who are in Ephesus.”

But what about the social boundaries, the relationships, and the differences between Jews and Gentiles within the new community of saints? The term “commonwealth of Israel” is, itself, a marrying of Roman culture into the history of Israel.¹⁷ ¹⁸ Unfortunately, the Jewish efforts to avoid assimilation and purity issues meant that, by the close of the 2nd Temple period, social barriers had been erected to restrict contamination of impurity and uncleanness.¹⁹

¹⁶ Acts 19:1-20

¹⁷ Commonwealth, and even citizenship, is not a concept commonly used in the Scriptures. Πολιτειας (politeias) is not used in the Septuagint and even πολιτης (polites), or citizen, is rarely used. Acts 22:28, however, speaks of a Roman tribune who bought access to the commonwealth of Rome for a large sum of money. Paul, on the other hand, was born a Roman citizen.

¹⁸ While the Biblical concept is that Israel has been, and still is, the inheritance of God and a chosen people to Himself, this never excluded Gentiles. They were always part of the plans of God and never removed them from His love. Jews and Gentiles have always been involved together. For part of God's purpose was for Israel to be a light to the Gentiles even as Abraham's offspring would be blessing for all nations. During the Exodus from Egypt, a mixed multitude departed Egypt alongside the Hebrew people. Thus both Jews and Gentiles stood before Mount Sinai to hear God speak and received the Torah.

¹⁹ Unfortunate not because the Jewish people should not have resisted the spiritual battle that Satan waged against them throughout the 2nd Temple period: trying to reintroduce idol worship (which Israel had participated in throughout their history but had turned away from); trying to force the Jewish people to renounce their faith in God; murdering those who obeyed the commands of God, etc. Unfortunate because, despite the great influx of Gentiles into the synagogues, foreign visitors to Jerusalem during the festivals, and many God-fearers among the Gentiles due to the influence of their Jewish neighbours being a light to them, the battle between God's children being in the world and of the world was a war being waged 2,000 years ago every bit as it is today. In their time, the prevailing idea of the more religious was to remove themselves from the world while others (such as the Sadducees and some of the Hellenists) thought to simply live as the world lived.

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Paul described what God had done through Jesus by describing the abolishing of the “wall of separation.” The wall is a metaphor for the animosity that existed historically between Jewish people and Gentiles. Paul describes it as “hostility” and history is replete with examples of extreme hostility and prejudice between Jews and Gentiles.

But in the Temple in Jerusalem there was also a literal wall of separation restricting Gentiles from full access to the Temple courts. The source of contention between Jews and Gentiles was the fact that the Gentiles did not keep many ritual aspects of the law.²⁰ This barrier, both physical and spiritual, had been put in place by the Jewish people. However, since the advent of the Messiah all barriers and walls of separation were removed. Gentiles now had full access to the commonwealth of Israel. Their presence in the household of God caused no contamination or unholiness. Jews and Gentiles could live together as they were meant to do since the beginning.²¹ And, importantly for the Ephesians (and us), it was the same God who was rich in mercy and who gave the covenants and law to Israel that tore down every wall that separated us.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56.²² Following a successful ministry trip described in Mark 6:7-12, the disciples returned to Jesus and made their report. They had preached the kingdom, cast out demons, and healed many people. The disciples had imitated their rabbi—teaching and acting as He had instructed and taught them. But they also heard about the death of John the Baptist. Several of them had followed John as his disciples before they followed Jesus, John would have been their friend and teacher along with being a great prophet. Jesus recognized that they needed some rest.²³

Jesus and his disciples attempted to locate a quiet place by boat. Some alone time was not to be, however, as people recognized him and ran ahead, gathering people as they went until

²⁰ Gentiles were never obligated to keep the ritual laws unless they wished to or wished to participate in certain Jewish acts of worship (which, again, was not a requirement for Gentiles to follow God). However, the fact that the Gentile world did not follow the ritual laws did mean that certain things would be forbidden them, such as access to certain parts of the Temple or joining in parts of certain festivals (the same would be true for Jewish people who were ritually impure).

²¹ Although we may retain our ethnic distinctions. Arab Muslims who become followers of Jesus remain Arabs as much as Jewish people who follow Jesus remain Jews. In heaven there will be people from every nation and language.

²² ACNA includes Mark 6:30-44. Mark 6:35-52 is not included in the RCL but is useful context for how Jesus showed His compassion and power.

²³ Sometimes taking time off in our busy schedules seems an impossible thing to do. We also may feel guilt for even having the desire to stop work for a while when there are still so many people who are hungry and lost. However, Jesus showed us that taking a break must also be part of our itinerary. This pattern was set for us by God Himself in creation. God rested on the Sabbath. He also called it holy. Everything else during creation was called good but the Sabbath was the only thing called holy. Having a rhythm of rest is also to be like God. So it is kind of important.

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there was a large crowd. How did they recognize Him? Jesus wasn't alone, His disciples followed Him. It wasn't only Jesus the people recognized, they recognized Him alongside His disciples who had also been teaching and healing.

The text reads that "Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things." One of the characteristics of the Good Shepherd is that Jesus has compassion. He knows what people need, and He provides it. The disciples needed rest and the people needed teaching. Jesus would provide both.

As the day drew to a close the disciples did something a student should never do to his teacher—they tried to tell him what to do. The disciples tell Jesus to, "Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." While the intention may have been a good one, it's not for the student to tell the Master what to do.²⁴ Both Jesus and the disciples noticed a problem, no food in a deserted place, but Jesus showed that He, along with His disciples (for they too partook in feeding the 5,000), would take care of the sheep. Jesus took the little food that was available and provided food for the entire flock. He did so after saying a blessing declaring it was God who provided all food.²⁵

Food is incredibly important in Judaism. Both worship and the festivals, celebrating God's miraculous and sacred history, involved food. But food isn't only important in the sacred—it's important for all mankind in all times and places. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all speak of times when the people would go hungry or even starve because of the terrible decisions of their kings.²⁶ It isn't just spiritual food that we need, while we may not live on bread alone but every

²⁴ We too sometimes try to tell God what to do. Whether we mean well or not, this is not a good approach for man to do before the almighty God. It has also been popular to inform God of all the things that are wrong in the world—God really should do something about that. In response, God may remind us of who we are (like He did with Job and his friends) or He may ask us what we are doing about it (in the case of Mark 6:37).

²⁵ The blessing for bread is called *הַמּוֹצֵי* (*hamotzi*). A generation before Jesus, it is recorded in Sefer Berachot that the sages Hillel and Shammai were debating when the blessing should be said and how many times. Is the blessing with each individual loaf of bread or one blessing for each meal? Thus we know that the words Jesus used to bless the bread were most likely these: "Blessed are you, the Lord our God, King of the Universe; you bring forth bread from the earth." (Note, the blessing is to bless God for the bread, not to bless the bread itself.) In His blessing, Jesus may have also been declaring that He was also divine as, just with the wine, He created bread for all.

²⁶ Ezekiel 34 echoes and expands on Jeremiah 23:1-6. Isaiah 8:16-22 speaks of a time when those who seek signs and portents, rather than God, would go hungry. Jeremiah 14 warns of the sword, famine, and disease that would strike Judah while Lamentations 4:4-10 looks back to the deaths of the great and the poor, the innocent and the wicked who died from starvation. Ezekiel 4:16-17 speaks of the fear that a lack

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word that proceeds from the mouth of God, note that Deuteronomy 8:3 is in context of physical food that God provided every day for decades.²⁷

In Israelite sacred history miraculous food accompanies acts of redemption, such as in the Exodus story with the daily provision of manna by Moses.²⁸ Heavenly banquets occur in the writings of the prophets in the context of the messianic era (Isaiah 25:6). One aspect of the Gospels is to present Jesus as the new Moses. Moses was a teacher, lawgiver, redeemer and miracle worker. The miraculous feeding by Jesus points to His redemptive ministry as well as His creative power.

Following another attempt to rest and pray,²⁹ Jesus continued to serve as a good shepherd, taking care of His sheep by being their healer. Jesus traveled throughout the land of Gennesaret and people flocked to wherever He went.³⁰ Jesus had become incredibly popular. People begged to just touch the fringe of His garment, perhaps having heard about the woman with the flow of blood (Mark 5:24-34) and many other miracles. Jesus was willing to meet people where they were in need, whether they were physically hungry and sick or spiritually hungry and sick. But it is also important to remember that, in the midst of all the miraculous, even Jesus' disciples were said to have their hearts hardened, for they did not understand. Seeing or even participating in the miraculous will not automatically make us good disciples.

of food would bring. Jeremiah 19:9, Lamentations 4:10, and Ezekiel 5:10 all speak of the horror that comes when people are desperate.

²⁷ God saved His people through providing physical food. In the war between Russia and the Ukraine, many refugees fled to Poland. There, many Protestants and Catholics (along with many local Orthodox) went to serve those who were in need. One group largely provided encouragement and teaching—providing spiritual food that was desperately needed by so many. The other group largely provided food and supplies that were also desperately needed by so many (both observations are anecdotal). Thank God they both came to serve because too often we focus on only the spiritual or only the physical and forget that God would call those who practice only one approach bad shepherds. Of course, God knew that we needed each other and built the church in such a way that we don't all function the same way but serve in unity.

²⁸ While the miracle of the manna in the wilderness was from the Lord, it was performed under the auspices of Moses and so, in Jewish tradition, is attributed to his leadership and authority (*Ta'anit* 9a.9-13). This doesn't negate the understanding that God provided but reminds us that God often works through shepherds, such as Moses, who requested food for the many rather than just for himself.

²⁹ Jesus went up the mountain to pray but he also sent the disciples to stay in one of their hometowns, Bethsaida.

³⁰ The Sea of Galilee had several names, Luke 5:1 calls it the Lake of Gennesaret. Between Capernaum and Tiberias, the town of Gennesaret had grown in a fertile region on the shore of the Galilee in the land of Naphtali. The name likely comes from the terms "gan", or garden, and "sar", or prince—the garden of the prince.

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Hebraic Perspective. There are many classes, speeches, and books that tell us how we can be a good leader, but our passages bring up two ways God expects His leaders to act. Mark 6:34 states that Jesus had compassion on the people for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Compassion is, perhaps, not the most important attribute of a leader in the eyes of the world. But compassion is important if we want to imitate Jesus. But after we have compassion we also should act—actually serve, feed, and guide those we lead.

The Greek, σπλαγχνιζομαι, (splagchnizomai and its derivatives, compassion) is only used 12 times in the Bible, but 10 of them speak of Jesus' compassion for people. Each time Jesus felt compassion He also acted. When God saw His sheep were being scattered and not cared for in the time of Jeremiah, He took action. God would raise shepherds who would spend the effort to actually gather the flock so they could dwell in safety, cared for by shepherds as well as the Good Shepherd. A midrash about Moses illustrates what a good shepherd looked like and how important it was to God that His leaders would be a good shepherd.

Moses did not begin his career as a shepherd. He was raised into Egyptian royalty and not accustomed to hard manual labour. Exodus records an incident when Moses slew an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite slave. He hid the body and fled the country once his actions were discovered. He remained in a foreign land for 40 years and married a foreign woman (seemingly without any notion of returning to Egypt to help the Israelites in their captivity).

In all this, Moses did not present as the hero type: he had anger management issues, was a murderer, and a coward. In one rabbinic midrash³¹ the question was asked, "When was Moses ready to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" The answer is found in the rabbinic commentary where Moses was shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro in Midian. One sheep wandered away and got lost. Moses left the rest of the flock to seek and return the lost sheep.³² Not only did Moses find the sheep, he ensured the sheep received water—for the sheep had wandered away not to rebel but because it was thirsty. Following this event, God chose to meet Moses at the burning bush, for God had seen the compassion of Moses over one small lost sheep—the humble and caring shepherd was ready to be a hero to lead a new flock.³³

Compassion and caring for others, particularly the lost, is a characteristic of biblical leadership. For those feeling the call of the Lord to a leadership position or currently in a leadership position, you should first examine your own hearts to see if you have compassion and the willingness to act on that compassion, this is a major characteristic of good shepherds.

ACNA Readings

³¹ A midrash is a Jewish story told to highlight a biblical truth.

³² Luke 15:3-7 may have been a familiar parable to Jesus' listeners in light of the Midrash about Moses.

³³ Exodus Rabbah 2.2

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Isaiah 57:14-21. The Hebrew Bible loves tension, when two concepts that might seem diametrically opposed are held close together in the text as a mystery. Isaiah 40-66 is a series of sermons, prophesies, warnings, and pleas—often spoken by God Himself. Isaiah 57:15 reminds us that God is holy, high and lifted up. He “inhabits eternity”. But He also is with the lowly. God is angry, and yet He will heal. God struck the iniquitous but He will also give peace, restoring them.

The peace that God will give isn't just some far distant event. Nor is it something that is only in the past. It is to the “far and to the near”. Peter, in Acts 2:39, used Isaiah 57:14-21 to give hope that God would heal even the iniquitous, even those who had harmed others for unjust gain—but it would have also been a reminder that God would be angry. Peter even states, “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

The people in the time of Peter were, indeed, far off from the promise in Isaiah just as we are far off from those who heard Peter. Not only that, but, as Paul spoke in Ephesians, Gentiles would also call to God and, though they were far off, would be given peace to live with all those who called on God.

Psalm 22:23-31.³⁴ Psalm 22 begins with the well known personal cry of anguish and suffering “My God my God why have you forsaken me?” The opening cry is personal from someone who has a deep relationship with God but cannot feel it. The psalm acknowledges that, though we often feel left alone or abandoned by God, the truth is that God has already proven that He can be trusted. Psalm 22:23-31 states that, despite the times we do not see His aid, we should and, indeed, will worship Him. And God is attentive to those in distress, He listens to the poor and all who call out to Him.

We should take notice of that fact—the Lord listens to the poor. Proverbs 19:17 echoes the same theme; ‘Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed’. The promise in the psalm is that the poor will “eat and be satisfied.” Those who seek God will also join with David in praise among the great congregation. Both the physical and spiritual needs of these people would be met—they would not be forsaken. Who are these people?

The offspring of Jacob and Israel should glorify and live near to God. But it isn't just the congregation of Israel and the great (or lowly) king David praising God. By verse 27 the praise

³⁴ Psalm 22 is composed by David for the overseer (לְמַנְצֵחַ), often translated as chief musician. Exactly who this person is remains unclear. It could be one of the choir leaders (Asaph, Heman, or Jeduthun) or someone else. Some Jewish commentators take this to mean God Himself from the word נָצַח (*netzah*), perpetual. (Thus some of these songs, such as are found throughout Psalms and even Habakkuk 3:2-19, might be written as a direct prayer to the perpetual overseer). The opening sentence says the Psalm is set to a piece of music called “The Deer of the Dawn”, which is a tune completely unknown to us today.

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and worship had been extended to the ends of the earth and all the families of the Gentiles. David, who was king of Israel in Jerusalem, knew that the good news of God would not be restricted to his people alone. The promise of God to Abraham would be fulfilled as all the nations of the world would be blessed. How this would happen David did not explain here in the Psalm, but he knew this would occur in the future—to people as yet unborn.³⁵

The pain and suffering experienced at the beginning of Psalm 22 is intensely personal. And yet others have felt the same pain and called out to God.³⁶ The salvation and subsequent praise is also deeply personal but it should also be communal, bearing fruit that has an impact on the entire world.

³⁵ There may be a hint towards a resurrection in Psalm 22:29 as even those who would die would also worship even as those yet unborn.

³⁶ Jesus quoted from this Psalm on the Cross. But tradition also states that others, such as Queen Esther also called out to God and quoted this Psalm before confronting Haman. (Tractate Megillah 15b:7-9, Babylonian Talmud) In both cases, a great salvation went out—not only personally but throughout the world.