

July 25, 2018

Greetings from Sixth Street Christian Church! I did some research last week in preparation for my most recent sermon. One of the scriptures I read up on was Jeremiah 23:1-6. Jeremiah was a prophet commanded by God to preach a warning to Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel. To paraphrase the prophet: "If you guys don't stop breaking the promises you made to God, then you will be overthrown and destroyed!" By the time Jeremiah finished his career, Assyria and Babylon had enthusiastically made his warning a reality. Jeremiah's words in 23:1-2 blame the "shepherds" of Israel for its downfall: "It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them." Because the kings of Judah had permitted or even participated in the worship of false gods and because they had let justice fall by the wayside, the people of Israel and Judah were scattered, captured, and enslaved. Jeremiah was criticizing the "shepherds" of his time for their lack of righteousness. In the bible, the word "righteousness" refers to right relationship. As people of faith, we are called maintain a good relationships with God and other people. When either of those relationships goes bad, righteousness has failed. The words Jeremiah spoke on God's behalf didn't end with his warning or the destruction of God's people. Jeremiah also spoke of God's plan to seek out the scattered, to rescue them from their oppressors, and to gather them into a flock once again. The righteousness in Jeremiah's time may have been in short supply, but the prophet spoke of a future when relationships would be made right again. God would raise up a Good Shepherd to replace the ones who had led so badly. That shepherd would reign wisely and "execute justice and righteousness in the land," and he would be called, "the LORD is our righteousness." Jeremiah was talking about the coming Messiah. We Christians believe the Messiah to be Jesus. When we let him shepherd us and gather us from where we have been scattered, our own righteousness will be renewed and our relationships restored.