**“Not Safe, but Good”**

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Psalm 23

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Ephesians 2:11-22

Mark 6:30-44

 8th Sunday after Pentecost

“Behold, the days are coming, declares 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 dwell securely.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

1

Not long ago, the “Lion King” was the rage. The “king of the jungle” was, **certainly then**, championed and heralded, the “Circle of Life” being the only **obstacle un-conquerable**, but dealt with by, **then**, the passing of a **kingly baton** from the father (King Mufasa) to his son (the then-**to-be-King** Simba).

C. S. Lewis (my favorite author) had written of **this** “**kingship**” years earlier (50 years earlier), but he to describe the **heavenly kingdom** which he (in this analogy) called Narnia with a lion king (Aslan) who he described as “Not safe, but Good”. One of the young children in the story, having just entered the realm through the “wardrobe” of the Gospel and God’s Church, had asked about the safety of being in the presence of the lion since she was about to meet him. “He is not safe” she was told, “but Good” she was also told. **There** was the **truth** deep (but accurate) that Lewis then began to unpack in this “Chronicles of Narnia”.

See, the Kingdom of **God and His Kingdom and Kingship** has its own “**Lion King**”. The “**Lion of Judah**” (**Jesus**) is (with and for His Father) the “King of the Jungle” / “**King** **of Kings**”. **He** is **the “King not safe, but Good”**, both **Just (as in Justice) and the Justifier (as in the provider of Righteousness)**. He is “not safe, but Good” as **C. S.** **Lewis wanted instilled into readers by his “Chronicles” yet, also, in all his writings (which is why I enjoy him so)**.

Which is the point that **Jeremiah writes of**, as does **Paul** to the Ephesians and **Jesus** teaching disciples and a “great crowd” hungry for His **Words**, then fed (beyond **them**) foods miraculous through **magnified** bread and fish … almost **sacramental** (as in mysterious and miraculous and blessed) with people gathered round Him (like we are in this building eventually gathered to the **rail** around where **He is** in bread and wine) … **where He’s at**, even if that’s at an earthly “desolate place”. The “Lion King” (in Jesus) was and still is not safe (but **Just to deliver justice** to a **rebellious world in those still unwilling to accept Divine grace and assume Divine duties** (not receiving mercy upon a confession of sins and not caring where God is and what He’s doing, un-concerned **themselves** about eternity so also un-concerned about that eternity for **others**), yet God “**compassionate**” (as in the **really** “**Good**” (gracious) with a capital “G”, perfect in love according to His own intention and desire that “all be saved and come to the knowledge of Him”), Him wanting “**sheep of His pasture” who know their need of Him as King for them and want to be faithful in Divine callings**.

**2**

Those **duties towards an eternal Good for ourselves and other** is called an **under-shepherding** **duty (under-shepherding under God’s shepherding)**. Jeremiah quotes the Lord as **providing a painful justice upon** **neglect there** (**bad shepherding)**: “**woe to** the shepherds who **destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture**” which you might think that lets off-the-hook **young children from God’s justice in that**, yet you (children of all ages) have also the under-shepherding responsibility (under God’s shepherding) to **concern yourselves with Him faithfully and worshipfully**. You’re to **concern yourselves with wanting Heaven as salvation provides** **and** **loving God for the gift of it**, **thanking Him for that** **merciful grace earned to bestow on us through His Son’s sacrifice for what is even your sins.** You (even children) **owe yourselves “self-shepherding under God’s shepherding”**. You **owe yourselves** **COMPASSIONATE** **CARE … as in, most, of Heaven and the things of Heaven**.

And parents, if that’s the **children’s charge**, then don’t forget **yours** **of them**. “Woe to the shepherds” (or **care-givers** who **should be eternally caring for their charge)**, “’**woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter**” (as in **risking loss of them for God**) **“the sheep of My pasture’, as the Lord declares”**. ….

Two weekends ago, my family gathered for a reunion much bigger than it’s been in a very long time. Many there (even though **family of mine**) I’d not seen in years. So, other than the short weekend of casual **hanging out in each’s brief company**, seeing so many **“family” members** left me, overall (especially in my study of this text) **wondering** how negligent **my** **shepherding-under-God’s** most-probably is. I’m (to this family that had been gathered to me to handily **care-for** **and** **have compassion for**) a father and grandpa, a son and a brother and an uncle and cousin (let alone, beyond those **more-important things**, a pastor). It occurred to me that, other than encouraging morality that this world embraces, there’s **Heaven and eternity that eternally matters**. If we **believe that Heaven matters for those we love and that God is, indeed, the King who’s just upon unbelief yet loving to His own, then Heaven has to be of an ultimate compassionate concern and we ought to** **treat it with the seriousness that it deserves**. We don’t **earn** Heaven by morality, and we don’t **deserve it** but have it to gain it by nothing except for **God’s grace and mercy (His forgiveness always ready upon our confession), and all for the sake of the bloodshed of the Holiest of Holy in Jesus**.So if we (or any we know) **think too much of ourselves (not needing Him)** then (being honest) **God might not think too much mercifully about us or our families**. Mercy implies the **need for it** and a welcoming of the gift of it where it’s provided. Grace known and welcomed as the **undeserved** favor of God that’s gift (such that no one can “boast of himself”), there’s where **salvation begins**.

And it’s where **baptism starts**. In the shallows of a baptismal font, people **humbly** get washed-from-them the filth of **dirt that’s theirs**, **cleansed (by God’s decision) into a whole new reality** (where the old reality without God couldn’t work). After that, what’s acknowledged at a baptismal font needs **carried in us, knowing of God’s sufficiency upon our insufficiency** …

… and I have no idea how **completely** my family group gathered together on the 4th of July weekend is in being **baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and appreciative of that**. **I didn’t ask about it … at all**. Maybe the time was too short, or the occasion seemed not appropriate, but (either way) **I didn’t ask**, so **pray that this gets appropriately asked somehow**.

**I am sorry** for any neglect by me of my serious and Divine duties as father, brother, uncle, etc. “Woe to me” is not something I want to hear God say to me for under-shepherding failures and laziness in me. **My Shepherd, though (because I am baptized into Him and what He’s done), forgives my confessed sins and does renew me (I know) for a better effort**. Where I know that I am under-shepherd **imperfect and seriously lacking**, **He is Shepherd-King who’s perfec**t:

“Behold, the days **are coming**, declares the Lord, when **I will raise up for David a righteous Branch**” (**history we’ve seen** **in the incarnation: birth, life, death, then resurrection of Jesus, the Heavenly Father’s own Son**), “and **He shall reign as king and deal wisely**, and shall **execute justice and righteousness in the land**. In **His days**” (which we’re living in the wake of since He brought salvation) “Judah” (His own people who are baptized into Him and believing and worshipful of Him) “will **be saved**, and Israel” (again, His own) “will **dwell securely**. And this is the **name** by which **He** will be called: ‘**THE LORD is our righteousness**’” ….

We don’t have to be **our own** “righteousness”. **God in Christ Jesus IS the RIGHTEOUS KING**. **He will** **judge** unbelief or neglect of eternal duties (and we must never feel good about those in us), but **He will save** from even our sins of lacking faith and not loving and trusting and our confessed neglects-of-compassion**, acknowledging (we with humility) where we have failed and need Him**. We are **GUILTY yet (with Him) FORGIVEN WHEN HIS**, so thank God (I do) for His **washing of me through baptism** and **I** **beg His forgiveness (even now) upon my sins**. “**Renew** **me**, Lord God, for an **ever more useful service to You with my family and friends**. May the **forever reunion of Heaven** **(greater-by-far in duration than just a weekend) be my goal and joy**. And may I **always** be an under-shepherd (under You) who **gathers and keeps-gathered sheep to Your kingdom**, never “destroying or scattering” but always, rather, **gathering and keeping safe family destined for Heaven**. **This is what** **I pray for**, in +Jesus’ name, Amen.