

Advent 2023

Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me: "Come with Your Rod"

Text: 2 Samuel 7:11-16

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Psalms 23

Dear Fellow Sheep – you who long for the return of the Good Shepherd:

We recognize and celebrate Advent as a time of preparation – a time to prepare our hearts not only for our celebration of Christmas but also as part of our continuing struggle to remain ready and prepared for our Lord's final return on Judgment Day. Our midweek Advent services therefore serve as a special, designated time for us to do what might otherwise get lost in the holiday shuffle.

The challenge here, of course, is that we tend to become numbed to any warning or encouragement that is repeated. Everyone here this evening has heard the warnings many times and has been encouraged to remain alert and watchful many times. Everyone has celebrated Advent in the past. Yet the fact that our Lord has magnanimously granted mankind another year of grace should never serve as a sleeping pill. Countless souls have undoubtedly been won during this past year. Yet God's patience should never become Satan's tool.

In an effort to avoid clichés and the mindless repetition that often works against us, during our Advent services we tend to order our preparation around a central theme that highlights a particular gift or aspect of our God, and thereby orders our thoughts and meditation according to a fresh perspective. This year, as you may have already noted from the service bulletin, the plan is to organize our midweek services around that simple, child-like prayer that many of us were taught from infancy: "*Jesus, Tender Shepherd, hear me!*" By doing so we are drawing special attention to the fact that Jesus is our Good Shepherd and the provider of all that we, his sheep, need. This evening we ask our Tender Shepherd to come to us, but to come with his rod.

Our devotion this evening will be based on the word of God recorded in 2 Samuel, Chapter 7:

^{ESV} ***2 Samuel 7:11-16*** ***Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."***

This is God's Word – that which God gave us to clarify our thoughts and to increase our understanding and appreciation for all that he has and will do for us. That our God would so bless us this evening, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

One of the things that Christianity demands is reality. In society we tend to play games with reality. We look at what could be or should be or what we would like to be, and pretend that that is what actually is. So we find ourselves pretending that mankind essentially created itself, that men and women are equally suited for everything from combat to nurturing, and that cows are aiding in destroying the planet.

The obvious problem when we play such games is that society develops the attitude that nothing that anyone says is real, or can really be trusted. Christians, above all others, can't afford to play that game. That doesn't mean that every personal opinion that falls from our mouths is the end-all for every debate, but it does mean that Scripture is again proved right when it tells us we are to "***speak the truth in love***" and when it reminds us of our calling to be messengers of God's gospel.

What does this have to do with "Jesus, Tender Shepherd, hear me"? Just this: we are not dealing in reality when we portray or project ourselves as anything greater or nobler or stronger or more courageous than simple, ignorant sheep – silly creatures in constant need of our Shepherd.

Yet forget we do, which is why our Good Shepherd has to allow reality to knock us down from time to time and to thereby strip away the illusion of strength and courage that, over time, we create for

ourselves. The fact is we are *always* weak, *always* needy, *always* totally dependent on our God for every single thing that we need.

I recall, for example, a conversation I had several decades ago with a rather seasoned Christian teacher who scoffed at and actually ridiculed the notion that any adult would continue to use the "Jesus, Tender Shepherd" prayer after he or she had grown to adulthood. I use the prayer to this day as a reminder that age doesn't change either our human weakness or our constant need for our Good Shepherd's care and protection.

That is also why we begin our Advent series this evening by asking our Tender Shepherd to come to us with his rod.

All of you are familiar with Psalm 23 – part of which we read at the opening of this sermon. All of you are therefore familiar with the statement there made: **"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."** What might not be readily apparent, however, is how or why the Shepherd's rod comforts us, or, for that matter, just how the shepherd used his rod in his dealing with his sheep.

The shepherd's rod in Old Testament times was both a weapon used against enemies in the defense of the flock *and* an implement of punishment used to chastise individual sheep themselves. David undoubtedly referred to *both* uses in Psalm 23 since David was himself a shepherd. In other words, he recognized both the enemy without and the enemy within. While it would come as no surprise that a weapon in the hand of your greatest ally would serve as a great comfort when that weapon is used to defend you from your enemies, that same sense of comfort is a bit more difficult for those who realize that that same rod can and will be used *to punish* them. How or why, in other words, should I be comforted in knowing that I myself can be beaten with my Shepherd's rod?

The answer, simply, is because I recognize that I am Jesus' little lamb. I am a sheep, and as such I am silly, notional, short-sighted and prone to wander into trouble. That's also why we pray every day: *"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."* You and I pray that because we *want* our Good Shepherd to do whatever is necessary to keep us on the path to life and to lead us back whenever we wander. That's what the shepherd's rod was all about. While it may sound cruel, the shepherd would actually use his shepherd's rod to break the leg of a particularly stubborn or rebellious sheep. Obviously to do something like that without cause or reason would be barbaric, but that's exactly why we refer to Jesus as our Good Shepherd. That's also why David said, **"Your rod and your staff comfort me."** David wasn't comforted by just any old weapon in the hand

of any old shepherd. He was, on the other hand, comforted beyond measure by the rod in the hand of his Good Shepherd.

He was comforted, of course, because – like any good sheep – he knew and trusted his Shepherd to know and understand his true condition and needs better than he knew them himself. He was smart enough to know that there was much he didn't and couldn't know. There were dangers that he didn't recognize and troubles that he didn't know to avoid. That's exactly why his loving Shepherd's implement of correction was such a comfort. He knew that his wise, loving Protector *did* know and understand the dangers as well as David's own weaknesses and ignorance.

Our text for this evening is, in fact, a great example of just why David knew to trust the wisdom of his Shepherd/Savior. Our text is a message from God himself to David through the Prophet Nathan. The setting was this: After David's enemies had all been subdued and God had given him rest and comfort after so many years of struggle and turmoil, David resolved to spend his remaining years and his fortune in thanking his God by building a permanent temple in Jerusalem.

Who could ever imagine that this was anything other than the will of God himself? Even Nathan, when he first heard David's plan, offered his wholehearted support and encouragement: **"Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."** That sealed the deal, of course, and David proceeded to plan the building of a magnificent temple as his gift of thanksgiving to his God.

Only that's not what happened, is it. In fact we read in the verses before our text that when Nathan went back home he had to be corrected by his Lord on this subject, and the message was unequivocal: *"Thanks, but no thanks."* This is what Nathan was commanded to tell David: **"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."** Even in something like a thank-offering, something that you and I would consider a no-brainer, even then neither David nor the faithful prophet Nathan was qualified to determine what God wanted and didn't want.

That's why this evening we ask our Lord, our Tender Shepherd, to live among us with his rod of correction. You and I are not qualified to determine which of our natural ideas or inclinations are good or bad,

pleasing or displeasing to our God. We don't and can't know which fit his master plans and which do not. We need a word from our God to be sure. We need, therefore, his correction.

There is more in our text that causes us to plead for his rod. Our text continues: ***"When he (David's heir) commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him."*** You remember, of course, that David's son – the one to whom God here referred – was Solomon. You will also recall that God made Solomon the wisest man alive. Yet even though he walked through life as the smartest guy in every room, Solomon still sinned, still wandered badly from the path his God would have him walk. In fact his unsurpassed wisdom often tended to cause him more harm than good. His intellect took him places he had no business going. He had to taste everything that the world had to offer, including the foreign idols that his countless wives and concubines carried with them into the King's household. In fact it was not a matter of *if* Solomon sinned, but *when*. So said God in our text. If the smartest man alive needed the Shepherd's rod, how much more you and I.

Nor did our text leave us in doubt as to God's ultimate goal: ***"...And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*** God obviously knew that the nation of Israel would soon be permanently divided and that the vast majority would fall away. He also therefore knew that a descendant of David would *not* sit for the rest of time on an earthly throne. This promise, therefore, referred to a very different sort of throne – one that would indeed last *forever* and on which a Descendant would sit for all time and eternity. That descendant was obviously Jesus himself. Jesus is always the big picture – which is also why we beg him to live among us at all times *with his rod*. This life holds no lasting promise other than the life to come, and no one can inherit that eternal existence but those who believe that forgiveness and redemption are ours through faith in Jesus Christ alone. So also we plead with our Tender Shepherd to bring whatever discipline is necessary into our lives to keep our feet on the path to life or to return us to that path if ever we wander. To this end we pray: *"Jesus, Tender Shepherd, hear me – and exercise your loving discipline in my life, as only you are able to do."* Amen.

The Sermon –

"Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me"

Nov. 29: Come with Your Rod
Dec. 6: Come with Your Staff
Dec. 13: Come as My Sacrifice

The Third Hymn (*Posted on the Hymn Board and projected*)

The Prayers of the Day

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction (*Spoken by the Pastor*)


*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God the Father
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Congregation: (*Sung*) **Amen.**

The Closing Hymn (*Posted on the Hymn Board and projected*)

Silent Prayer



HOPE Week 1 Candle Name: Prophet's Candle Candle Symbolizes: Hope Reminds Us: Jesus is coming Verse: Romans 15:12-13 Prayer: O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Who livest and reignest forever. Amen.	PEACE Week 4 Candle Name: Angel's Candle Candle Symbolizes: Peace Reminds us: The message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men." Verse: John 3:16-17 Prayer: O Lord, stir up Thy power, we pray Thee, and come; and with great might help us, that with the help of Thy grace, Thy merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede. Who livest and reignest forever. Amen.
Christ Candle Light on Christmas Eve  Verse: John 1:29	
FAITH Week 2 Candle Name: Bethlehem Candle Candle Symbolizes: Faith Reminds Us: Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem Verse: Luke 3:4-6 Prayer: O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Thy only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure minds. Who livest and reignest forever. Amen.	JOY Week 3 Candle Name: Shepherd's Candle Candle Symbolizes: Joy Reminds Us: The Joy the world experienced at the coming birth of Jesus Verse: Luke 2:7-15 Prayer: O Lord, we beg Thee, incline Thy ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of Thy visitation. Who livest and reignest forever. Amen.

JESUS, TENDER SHEPHERD, HEAR ME

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Midweek Advent Services – 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*

Pastor: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: Amen

P: The Advent mission of John the Baptist was to call the people to repentance. Applying that message also to ourselves, we confess our sins to God our Father, seeking His assurance of our forgiveness, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and unclean, and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and have failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment, both now and in eternity. I confess my sins, repent of them, and trust in my Savior Jesus for forgiveness. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

All (sung): **Lord have mercy on us. Christ have mercy on us. Lord have mercy on us.**

P: God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given His only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. By His command and authority, I assure each of you that your personal debt of sin has been paid in full. God, for Jesus' sake, has forgiven you.

All: Hymn 56 (Stanzas 1 & 3) (Red hymnal and projected)

The Scripture Reading for the Day

(November 29) ^{ESV}**(Romans 8:18-25)** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

(December 6) ^{ESV}**(John 16:15-22)** All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁶ "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

(December 13) ^{ESV}**(John 14:23-29)** Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. ²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.

The Confession of Faith – (The Christmas Creed)

***I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Who sent His Son to be my Savior;***

I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, my Lord, the long-promised Messiah, Who came as foretold, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, announced by the angels, worshipped by the shepherds, adored by the Wise Men, Who lived to suffer, die, and rise again, To free me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil;

***And I believe in the Holy Spirit, Who has brought me to faith in my Savior, and by whose continuous work in my heart, I rejoice in my salvation, walk in Christ, show forth His praises, and will one day live and reign with Him eternally.
Amen.***

The Second Hymn *(Posted on the Hymn Board and projected)*