

Have you ever heard the expression: "If you want a job done right, you have to do it yourself"? It's a time-honored saying, ... but it's not always true. There are some jobs, I know I'm simply not the best equipped to do. For example, I can assure you I will not be volunteering to do any kind of automobile engine repair anytime soon. Thankfully I have a mechanic in the family to help me with that from time to time! The bigger point is that when you think you have to **do every single** job yourself it shows that you're not a good manager. It shows that you don't surround yourself with good people and trust them to do **their** jobs.

Sometimes, though, that old axiom, "If you want a job done right, you have to do it yourself," is **absolutely** true. "I'd better do this one. It's important, and I know I have the expertise and the skill for this particular task that nobody else has. Also, I may be the one to whom this job means the most. If it really matters to me, I'm more likely to put in the tender loving care to do it juuuuust right."

For me that's true when it comes to ... baking a pizza. Yes, in my house, I am the self-appointed pizza chef. Now don't get me wrong, I love my family, I trust my family, but unless it absolutely can't be helped, I am in charge of pizza night. I've pretty much got it down to a science as to how long each type of pizza; thin crust, regular crust, or rising crust needs to cook either in our main oven or on our countertop pizza pizzaz oven without getting that tasty delicacy getting either burned on the one hand or being undercooked on the other. Yes, baking pizza is serious business to me. I want it done juuuuust right, so in this case it is true that: If you want a job done right, you have to do it yourself.

God entrusts many tasks to His people, much more serious than baking a pizza, (if you can imagine that!) Back in the days of ancient Israel, for example, God set **kings** over His people and called **priests** to care for the spiritual needs of their precious souls. But these leaders weren't always faithful. They didn't always care for the sheep entrusted to them as much as God did. So, in our text this morning, the Old Testament Reading for today, God tells Jeremiah that **He** will step in where His priests and kings have failed, and He **will do** the job **Himself**. The Lord Says to His People, "I Will!" "I Will!" "I Will!"

To the shepherds who hadn't been shepherding, the Lord says, "I will." In the ancient world, shepherding was a very important job, to which everybody could relate and understand.

Sheep were important too, not only for their wool, but as a major source of meat. That goes for both sheep and for goats. Sheep and goats were also an

important part of Old Testament Israelite worship—they were regular sacrifices, especially during the Passover celebration.

And shepherds had crucial tasks in caring for those vital flocks: They had to make sure those sheep were well-nourished and carefully directed to good, clean water. The shepherds also needed to provide shelter for their flocks and to protect the sheep from wolves and other predators. Last, but not least, the shepherds needed to guard their sheep from thieves.

So, with this in mind, we can see why God, through His Old Testament prophets, often speaks of His precious *people* as sheep and He describes their leaders as shepherds. People understood this metaphor. They could relate to the comparison.

God's prophet, Jeremiah, uses the image of a shepherd to talk about the priests of his day. They were to be the leaders to guide the people safely in the paths God wanted them to travel in life. The priests were the ones in charge of making sure that the people were worshipping God and Him alone and were staying faithful to God's covenant promise with His beloved people Israel.

The problem is, those priests who were *supposed* to be shepherding and caring for the people, weren't shepherding or caring for them at all. And the LORD was no longer going to allow it.

Just listen to His accusation in the first two verses of our text: "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! ... You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them"

The shepherd-priests had failed to take care of the flock. They had not taught the people the Word of the LORD and by not doing so they had scattered the flock rather than hold it together. And scattered sheep are not safe sheep. They have no leader to provide for them, to guide them, or to protect them! The sheep are in serious danger!

Have you ever played the children's game of 52- card pickup? If so, you know full well how anything that is scattered takes a lot more energy to make orderly. We *all* know how hard it is to put something back together once it's been broken, like a broken dish. It takes a lot more care and energy to find all the broken pieces scattered all over the kitchen floor and in the corners and crevices than it does to drop the dish in the first place. It's not always quick and easy, but we know we have to clean up the broken shards so that no one will end up getting hurt. It's definitely worth the time and energy!

In much the same way, God invests the energy and time to regather His people. He does it out of His love and with the result His people will be fruitful and grow. But sometimes the growing process can be painful.

The exile to Babylon would be the harsh consequence for the people's disobedience against God. Yet it was the shepherds who were to blame, for not teaching the people God's Word.

To these shepherds who hadn't been shepherding, God says, "I will." First, God says, "I **will** deal with you, you evil, self-serving, should-have-been shepherds! And it won't be pretty. Because you have not attended to My people. Behold, I will attend to **you** for your evil deeds," declares the LORD. (vv 2b-4).

But to the sheep, His precious people, the same LORD speaks wonderful words of comfort: I will. "**I will** gather the flock." He promises. "I will bring them home to safety and quiet. "And I will appoint new, **faithful** shepherds." The shepherd priests were about to find themselves out of a job. And if they didn't repent of their sinfulness and poor leadership, they would find themselves outside of God's eternal salvation, too.

But the priests weren't the only ones to earn God's wrath. There were the rulers in government too, and in those days the buck always stopped with the **king**.

To these rulers who *didn't* rule well, the Lord says, "I will." Being a **king**, much like being a priest, was also an extremely important job in the ancient world. God appointed a king over His people to lead them in all His ways.

And a king had many vital responsibilities: He was in charge of providing security for the people; to defend them against all enemies. The king was also in charge of promoting the economic welfare of the entire kingdom, which meant fostering trade with foreign nations. The king was also to administer justice and enforce the laws. Then finally, in Israel, above all, the king was to see to it that the priests properly did **their** job.

The Problem? These rulers **didn't** rule! At least not that way, the way God put them on the throne to rule.

As Jeremiah writes, King Zedekiah was basically a puppet of the Babylon Empire, the great enemy of Judah. Zedekiah rejected God's message through Jeremiah. Zedekiah allowed and even promoted worship of other gods. His actions, **too**, led to the destruction of the holy city, Jerusalem. His track record, like that of many of Judah's shepherd-kings, wasn't any better than those bad shepherd-priests.

So, what was God's solution? He says, "I will raise up a new king, a new David." (vv 5-6) Ironically, the name Zedekiah means "The LORD is my

righteousness,” despite the fact that he did not look to the LORD for his righteousness at all. So, the LORD now promises to raise up a **new** king, from the lineage of David, who will **truly** live up to the name “The LORD is my righteousness”!

“He will act wisely, execute justice, and save Judah,” God says.

We might have expected all of this. We would definitely expect God to replace wicked priests and kings, shepherds and rulers who weren’t doing their jobs. We’re not surprised that He’d gather His flock, give them new shepherds and kings.

But actually, God does something unexpected. *He says, “This job is **too** important and is more important to Me than to anybody else. I’m the one who has the know-how, the skill, and I’m the one who will give this job tender loving care like nobody else.”*

“I’ll do this job myself!” says the LORD. God replaces those faithless leaders with... **Himself.** **He** becomes the shepherd. Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd,” “the LORD,” “**my** shepherd” of Psalm 23.

Jesus, God’s Son, becomes the King. The righteous Branch, the new David, is the Son of David born to Mary. Today through His Word and Spirit, He reigns over us, always wisely, justly, **and** righteously, leading us in the paths of righteousness, comforting us with the rod and staff of His powerful Word, His Law and His Gospel.

What is more, **much, much** more, our Good Shepherd, Priest, and King lays down His life for the sheep. Through His suffering and His death on a cross, He becomes the sacrifice for His flock, His people, you and me so that with our sins forgiven, His goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!

In light of our text from Jeremiah today it is as if God the Father says, “Who will go for us, pay the price for these sheep who have followed their faithless leaders and wandered away? Who will suffer everything they deserve for **all** of their sins, even the punishments of hell, so that We can have them back with Us?” And God’s own Son answers, “I will.”

God, Jesus Christ, says, “This is a job for me. I will become your Shepherd and King. I will die for you. I will rise for you. I will wash you in Baptism. I will give you my body and blood to feed you the forgiveness of your sins. I will hear your prayers and we with you always to comfort you.. I will gather you to Myself on the Last Day.”

Sometimes it really is true: “If you want a job done right, you have to do it yourself”. In this case, this was most ***certainly*** true. This was a job only Jesus could do. And He did. And He will.