



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 21, 2024

Pastor Phil Birner

9th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Jeremiah 23:1-6](#)

Psalms of the Day: Psalm 23 CW

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 13:7-8, 17-21](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 6:30-34](#)

Meaningful Ministry Jesus Models a Compassionate Shepherd's Heart

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

In Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed:

I don't know why, but the term "Deus ex Machina" is something that I have been hearing thrown around more and more. Deus ex Machina, I think it's a video game now. Deus ex Machina, there is a company that is cranking out café racer motorcycles using that name. But it's all kind of weird. I mean, the term actually comes to us from the old Greek and Roman plays, some of which they made us read way back in college. For whatever reason, this term sticks in my head because whenever a character in one of these old plays got himself into so much trouble, got himself into a predicament where there was no possible way out, what the playwright would do is write into the script "Deus ex Machina." When that term came up in the play, what the stagehands would do is push out this big wooden boom crane on which there was a guy hanging who was dressed up like a Roman or a Greek god. Then they would proceed to wind him down from the boom crane onto the stage. The name Deus ex Machina literally means "god from a machine." This god from the boom crane then would proceed to sort out and solve all the major problems that were happening in the play. Then everybody would go home and live happily ever after.

If that sounds like sort of a hokey, cheap plot trick, you would be exactly right because even today, Deus ex Machina is sort of a technical term that is used to describe or is used in a play or a movie that has been poorly written; a movie where they need some sort of artificial device, some sort of improbable intervention in order to sort out and

solve the plot dilemma of the storyline in the movie. So you have Batman with his utility belt and he is able, at just the right time, to pull out exactly the right device that he needs to save and to sort out the whole situation. In real life, Batman would not be carrying around a utility belt. In real life, Batman would have a trailer behind the Batmobile, sort of a utility closet that he would have to carry behind him in order to come out and solve every probability.

Other than the fact that the special effects have gotten a whole lot better, I suppose it really doesn't say a whole lot about our slew of superhero movies and all that which have been so popular as of recent. It is, after all, a cheap plot trick, except for one place.

A cheap plot trick, except for us Christians, and it's not god from a machine, but it is our God from on high. This is the God that Jeremiah brings to us this morning as our comfort. God's people need not be concerned because He, our God on high, is very concerned about us.

Jeremiah has often times been called "the prophet of the eleventh hour." Here is God's right-hand man, trying to let the people know exactly what is going on. Unfortunately, even when they didn't want to know what was going on. And in this case particularly, the leaders of Jeremiah did not want to know what was going on because indeed, they were part of the problem. What was going on was the tremendous evil that was taking place in the land of Judah because of these inept, ungodly leaders and shepherds of Jeremiah's day. And so it is, God instructs His prophet to write, ***"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord.*** We talk about worst-case scenarios in movies, but most certainly, Scripture has a way of presenting to us some extreme worst-case situations for which indeed, from a human standpoint, there can be no possible way out.

The days of Jeremiah were the days of three super powers competing against one another: Egypt, Assyria, and the new up-and-comer, Babylon. What these kings of Judah did was to try to play the super powers off of one another. We might think, "Oh, how clever those guys were," except for the fact that everything they did was exactly the wrong thing to do. They made one bad choice after another bad choice, which compounded other bad choices. By the second to the last king of Judah, Judah had upset the new super power, Babylon, so badly that Babylon had come in and it had stripped out all the valuables of that beautiful temple of King Solomon. Then they took and hauled that stupid king of Judah off into captivity in Babylon. They proceeded to take with them all and any educated people that they could find, any skilled laborer that they could find, and shipped them off to the far off land of Babylon.

Surprisingly, Babylon actually let Judah continue to go forward. They actually let Judah have another king. What this King Zedekiah did was, again, to get Babylon so upset at them, and I don't know how you could get them any more upset at them, except for the fact that at this point in time when Jeremiah is writing, you have the entire armies of Babylon sitting outside the gates and walls of Jerusalem ready to rip the place apart.

So it is. We may complain about our earthly leadership, our politicians in our day and age, but boy, we have nothing to complain about compared to the leaders of Jeremiah's day. They were jumping constantly from the frying pan into the fire. I suppose you might say though, in a democracy, when it comes to leaders, we are part of the problem because after all, we are the ones who are participating in the process of choosing and picking our leaders, who indeed we need to be praying to God for wisdom, especially in these times of our elections that are going on right now. Our leaders still are God's representatives and whether they realize it or not, they are answerable to God. So obviously we, as Christians, should continue to pray for our leaders.

In our United States we have kind of a separation of Church and State. In Jeremiah's day, the king was actually a stand in for God Himself. The king was, after all, an example and something they looked at as the Messiah to come and a representation of that good leadership that was supposed to be there. In our day and age, we depend on our Christian pastors and teachers to be doing that work. We, as Christians, are to pray that these leaders remain true. It is the Apostle Paul who encouraged and urged these leaders, ***"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."*** Why? This is the scary part, as Paul continues, ***"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear."*** [\(2 Timothy 4:2-3\)](#) Dear people, we are living in those times, the times of itching ears. And believe you me, there are plenty of leaders out there, religious or otherwise, who will tell people exactly what those itching ears want to hear. So the admonition is to pray that your pastors, your teachers, continue to do the work that they are to do to encourage, in season as well as out of season.

God is watching carefully. God is concerned. God is concerned as He prepares everything for our future. The poor souls of Judah, under extremely bad leadership, Jeremiah continued to tell them what God said. God said, ***"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them..."*** A lot of the Jews at this point in time were off in Babylon. ***"...and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.*** God is vitally concerned about us.

So, where is the God who grants me all my wishes and lets me live happily ever after? Well, He is definitely there, but we definitely need to be careful not to put our all-knowing God under the constraints of we who don't know everything.

I just read a quote the other day: "It's hard to hear God's voice when you've already decided what you want Him to say." God has an interest in us and it goes beyond what our nearsighted here and now vision wants that interest to be. God has carefully scoped out our interests, our lives, for an eternal dimension. God's concern for us is that we would be with Him, happily ever after, forever. To that end, He had sent His promised Messiah, or was in the process of working out that promised Messiah. In Jeremiah's day, He was carefully controlling everything so that the promised Messiah would not get lost in the shuffle of Israel's evilness and the leaders' ineptness. God carefully sets aside His remnant people in the far off land of Babylon, where He keeps them safe.

In the same way, our God gives us this time of grace in this world. He doesn't NOT take care of us, but we do quite well. God wants us to be in this world. Indeed, oftentimes we are the salt, the preserving element, in this world around us and our God is carefully taking care of us for that purpose as well. But ultimately, God does not want us to lose our faith and that ultimate reward of everlasting life. That is God's promise to us. And no matter what may happen to us in this life, He is not going to let us go from Him. Indeed, that may at times mean that things do get uncomfortable as stuff happens to us. But again, it is always God's goal to keep us close to Him.

Let's review for a moment where our sin actually put us in God's eyes. Because of sin, really and truly, we were separated from God. By ourselves, we would want nothing to do with God and, in fact, we are nothing better than enemies of God. And God's just verdict for us, as sinners, should be hell. Even an eternity in hell would not pay God back for what we have done. Everyone born, living right now or will ever be born, stands in that exact same position. So in a sense, talk about worst-case scenarios/bad positions to be in.

But God, as Jeremiah continues to point out, is concerned about us. Indeed, God is so concerned about us that He planned a way forward. In the middle of the most terrible problems of the people of Judah in Jeremiah's time, Jeremiah gives the solution. He says, ***"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior."*** It was certainly not what anyone on Jeremiah's side would ever have expected; a most improbably solution, if you will; a solution right out of God most high. What Jeremiah tells the people is that a Branch, literally it's kind of a sucker shoot; a sucker shoot from a decaying ancestral line of King David, the last of which was wicked King Zedekiah. From that ancestral, rotted line would emerge a Branch. The New Testament Gospels take great pains to

show how Jesus was that new growth from the line of David, as both Matthew and Luke trace out the genealogy of Jesus Christ in the first chapters.

From that line of David that had petered out so miserably by Jeremiah's time, some 450 years before Jesus was born, from that line would emerge a solution. That solution, of course, was none other than our Savior Jesus Christ, who is just and is guiltless, without fault, and therefore, righteous. Measured by God's standard, this new shoot was everything that the original branches were not. He would save His people, and that's the reason He would be called "The Lord Our Righteous Savior." Jesus lived the perfect life, the perfect righteousness that you and I messed up on; that you and I, in countless times, as not being real good leaders ourselves, not being concerned about the shepherds out there, Jesus forgave us. God accepted the full payment of our Savior and declared the world righteous, for Jesus' sake. And now all, who by faith accept Him, are declared righteous (not guilty), assured of heaven.

Our God on high is concerned about every one of us. He will not let anything evil befall us that will take us away from Him. Indeed, even in this life, He watches over us. His Law carefully guides us. Indeed, God's Law was not something made for us to jump through hoops, but God's Law was something designed to assist us to live in this sinful world in as easy and as best way as possible. Our God is concerned about our future even if at times we are not. Most important of all, our God has provided us all with the needed righteousness through that wonderful Branch, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.