

**Sermon Notes – July 21, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“Jesus Honors the Caregiver”**

“It's like herding cats!” Chaperoning a field trip to the art museum, trying to keep a committee meeting on task, just trying to get the whole family to church on time - so many different priorities, so many individuals, each certain that they are in control of their own destiny. Even better: “A complete goat rodeo.” Imagine trying to convince a stubborn goat to perform on command, then picture multiple such events going on at once. You'll naturally come to the final vision, in which the goats are running the show and wreaking havoc on anything and everything in their path. Mark portrays similarly evocative images: “Many were coming and going, and they had no leisure time, even to eat” (6: 31); “They were like sheep without a shepherd” (6: 34); people “rushed about that whole region” (6: 55). We know all too well the constant coming and going, rushing about, wondering who is in charge and where it all stops.

Today's readings ask in various ways what it means to be settled, to be safe, to belong. Whether we use shepherding imagery or building imagery, we'll hear the truth that is both law and gospel: We are not God! God creates what we cannot.

With Jeremiah, we might consider all the candidates for the position of “shepherd” in our lives and look honestly at their leadership. Do they attend to the needs of God's beloved people? When do desires creep in? Together we can take heart in the Good News that in the midst of others who disappoint us, and despite our own failures, God promises that ultimately it is Him who will do the shepherding: “I myself will gather [them] ...and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missed” (Jer. 23: 3-4). Jesus embodies this promise. For the “sheep without a shepherd,” His deep compassion offers the teaching and healing that gathers them into the care of the One who does not disappoint. For apostles, whose busy calling might tempt them to think they are the shepherds, responsible for more than they can manage, Jesus' compassion offers the Good News that to “rest awhile” (Mark 6: 31) is also part of the call.

If the 2 Samuel passage didn't make it into the Advent 4 message, it pairs nicely with the Ephesians reading. We like to see ourselves as the builders! With David's presumption, we assume we know exactly what God should want. Sometimes it's foolishness and grandiosity; sometimes we believe we can pin God down, in a way that will work to our advantage. Either way, we hear the Divine chuckle and lovingly straighten us out: "I will make, ...I will appoint a place, ...the Lord will make *you* a house" (7: 9, 10, 11, emphasis added). We are not the builders but the building materials, Ephesians reminds us, made whole and holy with a diverse group of companions by the presence of the Father.