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Title: The God Who Puts Everything Right

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Text: [Jeremiah 23:1-6](#)

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The Butterball Turkey Company has always maintained and staffed a turkey hotline around Thanksgiving to help people answer questions they have about preparing turkey for the Thanksgiving feast. A couple of years ago a man called into the hotline to inquire about preparing a turkey that he had found in the bottom of his freezer... the turkey had been there for 25 years. The Butterball representative told the man that there was a

chance the turkey would safe to eat if the freezer had been below zero degrees for the entire 23 years. The Butterball representative said that even if the turkey was safe to eat the flavor would have deteriorated so badly that she would not recommend eating the turkey. "That's what we thought," the man said. "Well, in that case, we will just give the turkey to the church." I hope and pray, as we are in Season of Giving and turning in pledges for 2020 that we don't receive *any* 23-year-old turkeys.

This week is Thanksgiving and beginning on Thursday we will be gathering around tables with families, friends, loved ones, and in some cases, strangers. People will be coming together and as idyllic as we wish it were, bringing people together is never an easy task, despite our best efforts. Groups of people can cause one another great pain. We know this through as scripture records many others before us struggling with this issue of pain caused by others, often by those in power.

"Watch out, you shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture declares the Lord." This is what the Lord, the God of Israel proclaims about the shepherds who tend to my people. You are the ones who have scattered my flock and driven them away." Jeremiah 23:1-2a

There is a heart-wrenching scene in the Movie, Forrest Gump, based on the novel by Winston Groom. Jenny, the childhood girlfriend of Forrest Gump, has come home from one of her many self-destructive prodigal escapades.

She and Forrest go to the abandoned home place where she lived out her tragic years as a child. The house has deteriorated. The roof has caved in. The front porch and steps have fallen. The sight of the house brings back to Jenny an overwhelming tide of the tragedy and pain she experienced there; the loneliness, the poverty, and the physical, emotional abuse of a drunken father. All of these repressed memories rush in on her, and she loses it, and storms toward the house screaming and throwing things.

She throws her shoes, clods of dirt, and all the rocks she can find. When there are no more rocks to throw, she falls exhausted and sobbing to the ground. After an awesome stillness and a silence, broken only by sobs, Forrest Gump moves lovingly toward her, and as he lifts her says: "Jenny, sometimes there are just not enough rocks!"

The theologian Forrest Gump points out a great truth of life- Sometimes in our lives, there just aren't enough rocks.

To use a biblical term for this, all of us experience periods of exile in our lives, sometimes that exile is caused by ourselves, and other times that exile is caused by other people.

Even the church has, throughout history failed God's people and has sent people into exile.

Do you know what the fastest-growing religious group in the United States is-? The fastest-growing religious group in the United States is "nones." 79% of "nones" were raised in a religious community before leaving the faith.

Throughout history, even the church has caused people both near and far great pain, driven them into exile from not only the church, but the faith as well.

You may be asking, "How did everything in Jeremiah's day get so broken?"

It's a bit of a long story, filled with invasion and exile, but Jeremiah, once again speaking a word on behalf of God, blames the leaders of the people, those who were seen as shepherds to the people. These were folks called to lead in God's name and on God's behalf. However, they had been taking advantage of their positions and serving their narrow interests. Rather than leaders raising people up, they were instead being held down. The poor, the marginalized, the immigrant, the broken, any individual or group who was struggling were being held down, rather than being given healing and hope. In other words, what was not of God, became business as usual. Holding power was most important, not doing the will of God.

A few years ago, a couple came bursting into my office. They had been visiting the church for a few weeks and wanted to come to talk to me. I knew they had previously been members of a church near ours which had recently split. They proceeded to share with me the pain that had been inflicted upon them by their previous church. They were active, they were invested, they had raised their children in that church... and that church had become a source of great pain to them. As I sat there listening, I found myself wondering what in the world they were doing visiting another church. I found myself wondering why in the world they would even consider investing their time, talent, and treasure in the church. So, I asked them that very question, because I have to admit, if I had been through what they had been through, I'm not so sure I would darken the door of a church ever again. I would fall into that category of a "none."

They answered, "Because we still believe that the church is God's best plan for spreading the love of Jesus Christ and God's kingdom. That is why we are here, in the church. We believe with all of our being that this is God's best hope."

I have always loved their word they shared with me on that day, not just because it is an affirmation of what the church can be, but also because it points to the truth of the hope we have in God. The hope we have in Jesus Christ.

A word spoken by the Lord through Jeremiah long ago bears this truth to us about the nature and the character of God. It bears truth about the promise of God.

"I myself will gather the few remaining sheep from all the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their pastures and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will place over them shepherds who will care for them. Then they will no longer be afraid or dread harm, nor will any be missing, declares the Lord." Jeremiah 23:3-4

You will no longer be afraid or dread harm nor will any be missing from the family and the love of God. This is why it is not an individual who is our true Shepherd, rather it is God who is our true shepherd. It's why we place our faith, not in governments, political institutions, organizations, and yes, even the church, rather we place our faith in God as known through Jesus Christ. This is the one true Shepherd who works to redeem all things. In spite of how we might feel on any given day, God cares about our present condition and promises that fear will dissipate and that love and wholeness will rule the day.

I love what Brene Brown rights in her book *Rising Strong*, as she writes about a time of exile in her own life.

"How do all of these experiences come together to make up who I am?"
"Curiosity led me to adopt and live by the belief that nothing is wasted." Brene Brown

Perhaps even better news is that this restoration, this act of the God who puts everything right, does not merely stop in the present. The promise goes beyond the present to a great future, a reminder that the worst things are never the final things.

"The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous descendant from David's line, and he will rule as a wise king. He will do what is just and right in the land."
 Jeremiah 23:5

The time is coming... what a powerful reminder that what humans have messed up does pale in comparison to what God is able and willing to accomplish.

Brian Preston is a creative guy, one who can make things with his hands. He sees the beauty of imperfection in the world. He sees things that others have discarded as having a purpose in the world. He started collecting old wooden pallets he found on the side of the road, took them into his shop, sanded them down and cleaned them up. He then thought I can make some pretty basic furniture out of these and so he started making tables, lamp stands, office desks, etc. He put the furniture online to see if it

would sell. Brian was able to see something that was old, beaten down, thrown away and repurpose it for something new. He redeemed the piece as a new creation.

He didn't stop there, he wanted the new creation to expand, like a mustard seed. He said I began to realize that instead of talking about doing good I want to start doing good. He began to interact with a group of homeless men living in a tent village in the city. He began to teach two of these men the skills of carpentry. And then he begins to teach them how to make furniture out of wooden pallets/Together they started a company. Together, the three of them made and sold furniture out of old wooden pallets. Dignity, freedom, restoration, a new promise for life, not just for now, but for the future as well.

As we prepare for the week ahead, may we offer gratitude that we are children of the God who sets everything right.

That God meets us where we are,
Speaks to the possibilities of the present.
And offers us hope for the future

Will you pray with me?