“Jeremiad” was a term I’m pretty sure I learned after seminary, not while there—maybe through Jeopardy! or a crossword puzzle. I’m sure you all know it, but here’s Webster’s definition just in case you forget things as I easily as I do: “a prolonged lamentation or complaint” or “a cautionary or any harangue.”

And, yep, it was our prophet Jeremiah whose name gave birth to the term. And, yep, today’s reading from Jeremiah serves to point out how it came to be.

“Woe” reminds me of “whoa!” (w–h–o–a) in today’s parlance. Woe to those who scatter people apart in the guise of bringing them together. “The Lord’s going to take care of you, all right,” Jeremiah roars at them, “while he gathers the people you’ve scattered and bring them home. Home to each other. Home to me.”

John Prine died lasts year, which makes me doubly glad we saw him in concert just a year or so before that. One of the last songs he wrote—and I’ve mentioned it here before—is “Summer’s End.” It has a haunting refrain, and like so many songs, just reading the words doesn’t do it justice. It’s a gem, every verse, every line. I’ve picked this one, almost at random: “The moon and stars hang out in bars just talking/ I still love that picture of us walking/ Just like that ol’ house we thought was haunted/ Summer’s end came faster than we wanted.”

And here’s the refrain: “Come on home/ Come on home/ No you don’t have to be alone/ Come on home/ Come on home/ No you don’t have to be alone/ Just come on home.”

For all his “woes” and “whoas” Jeremiah seemed to be singing that same song about 2700 years earlier. You don’t have to wander around in the cold and dark or in the burning heat, satisfied *some*what, but still suffering, because someone told you that you have to define yourself by those you’re against. As in “We’re better than those people; at least we’re not like *those* people.” Because we’re all the same people, God’s people.

Jeremiah in essence asked the people of Israel, and by extension, asks us, “Would you rather be right (“righteous” was his term) or . . . happy (“fruitful and multiply” and “safe,” his terms)?”

We all want to be right *and* happy, of course, but we so often wind up being a little bit right and massively unhappy and angry. At least by reading Jeremiah we know it’s nothing new, but that can be pretty cold comfort.

Jesus alludes to sheep and shepherds in today’s reading from Mark, noting that the people crowded around him are like sheep without a shepherd. It’s a theme he employs over and over, most memorably in the tenth chapter of John’s gospel, identifying himself as the good shepherd. He contrasts himself to the hired man who runs away as soon as a threat to the sheep in his charge appears. Jeremiah rails against something worse—shepherds who deliberately lead their sheep astray and scatter them—a special place in hell for them, he says without saying it.

The question for is in our world today is who or what will guide us? It’s a serious question—politically, economically, socially, environmentally, medically—and, oh yes, morally and spiritually.

Well, the answer is clear to us Christians: Jesus will guide us. “What would Jesus do?” was the bracelet fad a few years ago. A bit too glib for my taste, a kind of bumper-sticker approach to our faith. But, it points us in a worthwhile direction.

It’s not clear what precise policies Jesus would favor for climate change, inflation, and pandemics, to cite a few examples. We simply don’t know if Jesus would vote yes or no on a particular piece of legislation. (That doesn’t stop us from *feeling* certain that we do know.)

We do know, however, some consistent qualities that marked Jesus’ life and ministry—compassion, mercy, peace, and love. When asked to sort it all out—“it” being how to live in the world as a faithful person—he said, “love God. Love your neighbor as yourself.”

That home was the one to which he calls his followers, that place where compassion and love overrode other considerations. He made it clear that giving food and drink, shelter and clothing to the least fortunate in society was the same as showing compassion to him—in other words, loving God by loving neighbor.

That is the loving home to which we’re called, even when we’re the call is issued by a quirky, twangy troubadour: “Come on home/ Come on home/ No you don’t have to be alone/ Just come on home.” + + +