



Lamb of God Lutheran Church – Columbus, Ohio
November 30, 2014 (1st Sunday in Advent)

Preacher: Pastor Timothy Wagner

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Sermon Theme: Advent Hope

The countdown has begun. Advent is upon us. Tomorrow, the calendar turns over to December. Before you know it, Christmas will be here. It's a time most of us look forward to—the beautiful lights and decorations, the time with family and friends, the favorite hymns and carols, the special worship services, the gifts given and received. If it weren't for all of the preparations that still have to be made, we might wish that it was Christmas already, that the waiting was over. But instead, Advent teaches us to wait patiently, as we light the candles one-by-one and mark the passing of time on our Advent calendars.

Of course, not everything that we wait for comes with a calendar. A young adult waits to meet that special person with whom they will spend the rest of their life. A man who is out of work waits for the day when he will start receiving a paycheck again. The woman who is battling cancer waits for the treatments to start to work. The aging Christian waits for the day when they will finally get to go home to heaven. Waiting can be hard, and I think it's even harder when you don't know how long you'll have to wait.

Imagine what it must have been like for those who were living in and around Jerusalem 2600 years ago. Their land was coveted by neighboring nations because of its key position for trade. Because most of the Israelite people had turned away from the Lord to idolatry and unbelief, the Lord allowed the land of Israel to be taken over by one nation after another. The northern kingdom of Israel had already fallen, and now the Babylonians were advancing on Jerusalem. Again and again, the Lord had warned the people that this day would come unless they repented of their sin and unbelief and returned to the Lord. But few listened. Now, as the enemy armies advanced, it was not a matter of if, but when, Jerusalem would fall. All they could do was wait and hope that, somehow, they would escape.

On the other hand, the prophet Jeremiah and a faithful few did believe the Lord and his word. They repented of their sins and trusted in the Lord. But because Israel as a whole had rejected the Lord, destruction would still come on Jerusalem. How they must have prayed every day that the Lord would spare them from torture and death when Jerusalem fell. But Jeremiah wanted to assure the faithful of a far greater hope than that, the same Advent hope to which we cling. Listen to the words of the prophet from Jeremiah, chapter 33:

14 " 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

15 " 'In those days and at that time

***I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.***

16 In those days Judah will be saved

and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The LORD Our Righteousness.' "

Israel had once been like a mighty tree. In the days of David and Solomon, their borders expanded, and it seemed that no nation could stand in their way. But, after King Solomon,

things began to fall apart. The nation was divided in two—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. And the kings who sat on the thrones of those nations led the people into physical and spiritual adultery. The people who had been chosen and set apart by the Lord began to look like all of the unbelieving nations around them. During the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet, the last of David’s descendants would sit on Judah’s throne. The once mighty tree would be reduced to a seemingly lifeless stump.

But the Lord had promised King David, ***“When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom...I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him...I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever”*** (1 Chronicles 17:11,13,14). When Israel and Judah fell, it may have seemed like the Lord had broken his promise to David. David’s kingdom did not last forever. David’s descendants were no longer kings, but prisoners and exiles.

But Jeremiah assured all who would listen that the Lord had not forgotten his promise. He would make a righteous Branch sprout from the stump of David’s line. That Branch would be unlike all of his ancestors. The Lord prophesied, ***“He will do what is just and right in the land”*** (v. 15). His heart and his life would be perfectly and completely devoted to the Lord, the only true God. He would never stray from the Lord or turn aside to other gods. He would fulfill all of the law’s demands, thinking, doing, saying, and desiring only what was right in God’s eyes. That Branch, of course, would not only be David’s descendant. He would also be the Son of God himself, the one whom we know as Jesus Christ.

Jesus would fulfill what unfaithful Israel and Judah had failed to fulfill. Jesus would accomplish what fallen mankind falls short of every day. As he did, he would ***“fulfill the gracious promise [the Lord] made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah”*** (v. 14). That promise was to send the offspring of the woman to crush the head of the devil once and for all (Genesis 3:15). That promise was to be their ***“compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,...and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin”*** (Exodus 34:6-7).

Through the righteous life and innocent death of the righteous Branch, Jesus, Judah would be saved from an enemy far worse than Assyria or Babylon. They would be saved from the ***“devil [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8). They would be ***“rescued...from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of [God’s own Son], in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”*** (Colossians 1:13).

The name by which Jeremiah calls Jesus in verse 16 reveals how he would accomplish that awesome rescue. He calls him, ***“The LORD Our Righteousness.”*** Jesus would do what was just and right every day of his life, and then he would give that righteousness to sinners, and he himself would take the place of sinners under God’s righteous judgment.

That was the ultimate rescue for which the faithful in Jerusalem were waiting. That was the advent hope to which Jeremiah encouraged them to cling, as enemy armies advanced and Judah fell. They would not see it in their lifetimes. In fact, it wouldn’t be fulfilled for another 600 years, but by faith they knew that the Lord would keep his promise and, through the righteous Branch from David’s line, they would be saved from sin and death. They knew that one day, they would live in eternal safety, clothed in the righteousness of their Savior. This confident hope would strengthen their spirits and comfort their hearts in the dark days that lay

ahead. It would give them peace and joy, even when the whole world was in turmoil around them.

Do we ever feel like the faithful few in Judah? The devil and his forces seem to be advancing ever more rapidly in our world. While God's church cannot and will not fall, it seems like our camp is getting smaller while the enemies are increasing. Some have already concluded that we are living in post-Christian America. Does what is going on in the world around you ever make you feel lonely and afraid?

Or are the battle lines drawn even closer than we'd like to admit? Within my own heart and life, I see a war going on. On one side is a child of God who wants to faithfully follow where he leads, to believe every promise that he makes in his Word, and to trust that he loves me and will one day come to rescue me from this world of sin. On the other side is a selfish and short-sighted sinner who looks for the path of least resistance in life, who questions everything that God says, and who sees struggles as proof that God doesn't really care. And, as I review the battle records, I see how often I have let that sinner win, and that makes it all the harder to believe that there is any hope in the long run.

But through his prophet Jeremiah, the Lord wants to give us the same advent hope that he held out to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He assures us that he is the same gracious and righteous God who kept his promises to Israel and Judah. He made a righteous Branch sprout from David's line to do what was just and right in the land so that he would be "***The LORD Our Righteousness.***"

When Satan accuses and temptations to despair attack us, we can say with the hymn writer, "***Jesus, your blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress. Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed with joy shall I lift up my head***" (CW 376, st. 1). Jesus' righteousness is our righteousness. No matter how fierce the attacks against our faith from the world or from within our own hearts, that promise of God can never fail. We stand righteous and holy before God through Jesus our Savior.

And, dressed in his righteousness, we are filled with advent hope, as we look forward to his coming again. We don't know when that coming will be. There are times when the waiting is long and hard. But we cling to advent hope because our God is faithful to all of his promises. In advent hope, we wait patiently, knowing that when the Lord Our Righteousness comes again, we will finally and eternally be safe in the arms of our loving God. Fill us with Advent Hope, Lord Jesus, and come quickly! Amen.

Lessons for November 30

Genesis 19:15-17,23-29

¹⁵ With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”

¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”

²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶ But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. ²⁸ He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

²⁹ So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. ¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you

may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”