

First Sunday in Advent; December 1, 2024

Jeremiah 33:14-16

“The Savior Brings Hope”

Listen, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the good promises that I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time,

I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David’s line.

He will establish justice and righteousness on earth.

In those days Judah will be saved,

and Jerusalem will dwell securely.

This is the name she will be called:

The LORD Our Righteousness.

The first of the four Advent candles on our very pretty wreath is named “Hope,” and the lessons for this Sunday fit that word like a glove. Hope is not what Jeremiah’s prophecy is all about all the time, but the three verses you heard from its thirty-third chapter are pure hope.

What makes you hopeful? A lot of students are hopeful this time of year because they can see the light at the end of the tunnel of finals. Some even have graduation to look forward to. They’re hopeful about the future. You can often see it in their eyes. Often, though, when we begin to look ahead we become anxious and uneasy. Anxiety and worry are so normalized now that we may even think they are okay. But God’s Word tells us not to worry, and not to be anxious. We need to let God work on this for us, to increase our hope and calm our fear about the future. What makes you worried and anxious, less hopeful or even hopeless? If I paused to let you write a list, how long would it take? Would you have to break for lunch before you finished? I would. And that’s not God-pleasing. Lord, through the words you gave Jeremiah, fill us with bright hope.

Jeremiah’s nickname is “The Weeping Prophet.” If you read his whole book, you will find a man struggling to hope. Whatever your troubles, Jeremiah would understand your condition. He often struggled with the seemingly hopeless conditions of the time he lived.

First of all, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in a time when God’s people refused to listen to sermons. They resented God’s Word and his messengers. At least twice there were attempts to kill Jeremiah. He was also arrested and held prisoner at the bottom of a well. You heard me say Jeremiah struggled to hope. Let me prove it. Jeremiah shared his feelings of frustration and hopelessness as he prayed to God:

You persuaded me, LORD, and I agreed to it. You are stronger than I am, and you won out. I have become a laughingstock all day long, and everyone is mocking me. Whenever I speak, I cry out, “Violence and destruction!” But the word of the LORD has brought scorn on me. I am mocked all day long. If I say, “I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name anymore,” then there is burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones, and I am weary of holding it in. I cannot! Let me paraphrase: “Lord, I didn’t really want to be a prophet, but you talked me into it. And all I’ve gotten so far is laughter and rejection. It’s not

helping anything. So part of me wants to give up. But deep inside, under the hurt and rejection and worry about what comes next – somewhere, there’s still hope.

Even more tumultuous than Jeremiah’s inner struggle was the situation around him. The people were going on like nothing was wrong, but Jeremiah knew destruction was around the corner. God’s people had been divided for some time now between the kingdoms of Israel in the North and Judah in the South. Israel had already fallen to the Assyrians and now Judah was backed onto a cliff of its own. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was about to conquer Jerusalem and enslave its population. The temple, the glory of Jerusalem, was about to be destroyed. Jeremiah was called to tell the people that this would happen. He had an even more difficult job than that though. He was called to tell the people that this was all happening because they had brought it upon themselves. They’d rejected the God who loved them so much. Filled with false hope that everything was going to be alright, they – not just Jeremiah, but all the countrymen he loved – would soon be conquered.

But do you see a difference? Jeremiah had faith, and so under his worry and weeping there was still hope. The unbelievers around him had false hope, based on nothing, and it would soon be dashed. What would happen to the hope still inside Jeremiah’s believing heart?

Whatever worries you and stifles the hope inside you...could you agree that Jeremiah had at least as much reason to be worried and afraid, to let his candle of hope go out?

Into this hopeless situation God gives a remarkable word for Jeremiah to preach to the people. Not only would it later give them comfort, but it comforted him during this hopeless time. **In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David’s line. He will establish justice and righteousness on earth. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. The is what she [Jerusalem, the city and people of God] will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.**

In the middle of the chaos and uncertainty, God gives this healing and refreshing promise to Jeremiah and all the people to hear. It’s more than just a word, though. It’s the word, the promise, that will change reality. It brings hope to a hopeless situation. Jerusalem would experience terrible bloodshed, anguish and enslavement for their sins. Yet, God says that’s not the final word. Once again, she will dwell in security and enjoy prosperity. There would be a time when the people will be hopeful again, and because their hope will rest on the Lord’s word, it will be satisfied. And that did happen, eventually. When the people were finally captive in Babylon they would hope in this promise of the prophets: that God would restore his people forever. As Isaiah had promised, though their sins were like scarlet they would become what as snow. Perfectly forgiven and perfectly restored.

This great reversal happened when the Jews returned from exile; but that was just a glimpse of the final fulfillment of this promise. The fullest restoration of peace and prosperity came for all of God’s people – his fullest Israel, all believers, when a lowly rabbi entered God’s city as a humble king on a donkey. Jesus fulfills Jeremiah’s word perfectly, fully, and finally. He is the seed of David, the righteous branch that sprouted up.

The people received Jesus as king...at first. They thought he’d come to do what a victorious king would do: he’ll make sacrifices at the temple in thanksgiving to God and then take up David’s throne. What Scripture makes clear is that he had come to make sacrifice, but the sacrifice would be his own body. The same Jerusalem who had rejected God in the time of Jeremiah rejected Him again. He was enthroned on

a cross and crowned with thorns. People thought this Jesus was the hope of Israel, but now he was gone. His disciples fell into hopelessness and locked themselves up in a room to avoid meeting an end like his.

Then the promised king came to them when they were at their lowest and most hopeless. He entered through those doors they had shut themselves behind their own hopelessness and misery and said, **“Peace be with you.”** Hope: profound and permanent hope was theirs because Christ has risen from the dead. That is yours in Jesus, too. Jeremiah said that the kingdom of God would be known as “The Lord is our righteousness.” That righteousness became yours when God placed his name upon you as you joined Christ in his death and resurrection at your baptism. His death has done away with Israel’s sin, Judah’s sin, your sin. His resurrection has given you life that is in God. So you know that no matter what troubles you or causes you to lose hope, God will not lose you. And that gives hope through all.

At the time of Jeremiah, the people were not very attractive or lovable at all. God does not love us and restore our hope because we’re so lovable. To be lovable to God, you must first be righteous completely. He makes us lovable in that righteous Branch. We’re forgiven and made white as snow by God’s grace.

Now apply that to your seemingly hopeless situations, to your worries and anxieties. The counsel of others is too often that if you think positively then positive things will happen, or that if you just wait good things will happen. There is not time to explore the insanity of this advice. But you should know this: you don’t have to imagine that good things will happen to you. The best thing has already happened to you! The Righteous Branch has come and made you one of God’s saved people, his spiritual Judah and Jerusalem. Don’t just wait for good things possibly to happen, but rest on the Lord’s word of eternal hope, and know that the best thing is going to happen to you when the troubles of this world have passed.

Just as in Christ God the Father loves us before we were ever lovable, so also he gives us hope before we were ever hopeful, and he gives us hope when we feel hopeless. Christian hope is not dependent on how you’re feeling at a given moment or what is happening within or outside of you. Christian hope is summed up in the name Jeremiah promises us, “The Lord is our righteousness.”

Say this and to trust this: “The Lord is our righteousness!” That gives true hope. Many people heard Jeremiah’s message and rejected it because they couldn’t see beyond the present. The present promises of either health and wealth or gloom and doom. And when things in the present went sideways, their hope went along. Gone.

Even before their exile, a few heard Jeremiah. And after, even more did. And they saw the glory and awesome wonder of their God. They trusted that one day He would restore all things just as he promised. That all the things they hoped for and couldn’t find in the world – peace, security, health, and life – could only be found in the God who raised up – and then raised up from the dead – a branch from David. Wherever you place your hope will determine your actions and your mind in the present. Later, by the rivers of Babylon, they hoped for the future they confessed their sins and received the love of God. Later, they lived in the midst of their troubles trusting that God would deliver them out of them all. Later, they sought not to live as they did in the past worshipping and hoping in false things and sinning against their God. They sought God and looked forward to the arrival of the righteous King.

We should take their examples, both negative and positive, to heart. Let's hope now in the glorious gospel and the future we have in Christ. May we live in the present with our eyes on Christ's arrival, and all the hope he brings with him, hope that cannot fail, hope that endures through eternity, hope that overcomes fear and worry in the present. In Jesus' name. Amen.