

The First Sunday in Advent

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16 (NIV)

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.’

Theme: In Christ there is always Hope

There are times in life when all of our hopes seem to be dashed. All that we have worked for is gone. People whom we trusted disappointed us and might have even betrayed us. We recognize how we have failed. There are so many things that we might have done differently if we had the chance.

Our text was written at a time that seemed hopeless for Israel. It was a time of political corruption, and even worse, the national was literally on the brink of destruction. In the face of impossible odds, God promised His people hope. Even when the whole kingdom was like the stump of a great tree, a new shoot would spring up.

This world often seems hopeless, but that is where the good news of Advent comes in. It tells us that help is on the way. Advent means “coming.” It is at this time of year that we remember that God comes to help and save His people

I. There are times when our hope in God seems foolish.

It was for Israel at that time. These were rough times for Judah. They had a God-fearing king named Josiah. He was a great man, probably the best king that Israel ever had. He restored the proper worship of God and ruled the people justly. However, he was suddenly killed by an arrow in a battle against Egypt. After his death, things went badly for Judah. The nation never had a good king again. In chapter 22 Jeremiah says that Josiah was a just and right king. He defended the cause of the poor and needy. However his Grandson Jehoiakim was a wicked king. He set his heart on dishonest gain. He shed innocent blood and ruled by oppression and extortion. (22:17) He was so wicked that God would not forgive (2 Kings 24:4) The kings never got any better. The two kings after him were just as bad. Zedekiah, the last king, even had Jeremiah imprisoned. It was from a jail cell that Jeremiah made this prophesy.

It also seemed impossible that Israel could live in safety. The Babylonians had conquered most of Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim. Now Jerusalem itself was under siege. Even the king’s palace had to be dismantled and used to defend the siege. Jerusalem was about to fall. If there was ever a time to doubt God’s promises, this was it. Jeremiah promised a righteous king when there was political corruption and peace while the city was of the verge of being destroyed.

When you think about it, God promised His people many things that were difficult to believe. He promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child and many descendants. They were 75 and 65 years old at the time and waited 25 years for that promise to be fulfilled. He promised Moses that

he would lead Israel out of the most powerful nation at the time to the promised land. He promised Gideon that he would defeat the Midianites with only 300 men. Jesus promised His disciples that He would rise from the dead, three days after His crucifixion. These were all very difficult promises to believe.

God also promises us some difficult things to believe. He promises us the forgiveness of sins, but have their been times when you felt so ashamed for something you did that you wondered whether anyone including God could forgive you? Did you ever have a series of setbacks in life? You kept looking for the light at the end of the tunnel. Every time you thought that you saw it, it seemed like it was another train that ran you over. It became difficult to believe that things would every get better. It was tempting to scoff at the assurance that things will work out or that this will work for you good in the end. Sometimes when we think about our loved ones who have died in the faith, it is difficult to really believe that they are with the Lord and that we will see them again. God promises us His forgiveness, deliverance from all evil, and eternal life in heaven, but there are times when it is hard to believe it.

II. God fulfilled every one of His promises to His people of old.

Think of the examples that I just cited. Abraham and Sarah did have a son when he was 100, and Sarah was 90 years old. Moses led Israel out of Egypt to the promised land. Gideon defeated the Midianites in a very unconventional way. Jesus did rise from the dead, just as He said.

God fulfilled this prophecy partly when the exiles returned. Babylon conquered Jerusalem in 587 BC. The city was destroyed, and the people were taken to exile in Babylon. But 70 years later a great miracle happened. King Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon. He told the Jews to returned to their homeland Just as Jeremiah predicted, the people came home and Jerusalem was rebuilt. Earlier in this chapter Jeremiah prophesies that they will return singing, *“Give thank to the Lord Almighty for He is good; His mercy endures forever.”* (33:11) God would have mercy on His people. Their captive would last only for a brief time. They would return home.

III. This prophecy was especially fulfilled in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the righteous branch that sprouted from David’s line. The people did return to the promised land, but they never had a king again until the coming of Jesus Christ. In this morning’s Gospel lesson we heard how He humbly rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. As He arrived in the city, the crowd cried out, *“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”* They saw that He fulfilled this prophecy. They even began to sing the angels’ song at Jesus’ birth, *“Glory to God in the highest.”* Jesus is a righteous king. In His ministry on earth, He defended the poor and needy. He healed the sick. He called hypocrites what they were. He forgave those who repented of their sins. He gave His own innocent life for the forgiveness of our sins. Notice what this new Jerusalem is called, *“The Lord our Righteousness.”* Our hope is not in our good deeds, but that Jesus is our righteousness. We trust in His forgiveness and salvation for us. It also says that Jerusalem will live in safety in those days. The second Jerusalem which was rebuilt after the return from captivity was destroyed again in the year 70 AD. However, Jesus says about His Church, *“The gates of hell will not prevail against it.”* The church will remain until the second coming of the Lord. In Revelation 21 St. John sees a vision of the new Jerusalem when Christ returns. That is when these verses find

their ultimate fulfillment. It says, *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”* Those are God’s promises to us: forgiveness, deliverance from every evil, and eternal peace and joy in His presence.

IV. It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we are a part of that blessed city.

St. Paul writes in 2 Cor 1:20 *“No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘yes’ in Christ.”* It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we are sure that God will do everything that He promises. How can we be so sure that God will forgive our sins? It is because Jesus paid for them. How can we be so sure that God will deliver us from every evil? It is because Jesus is at the right hand of His Father, ruling all things for His people. How can we be so sure that we will one day inherit the heavenly Jerusalem? It is because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He is now preparing a place for us there. The name of the city is *“The Lord our Righteousness.”* It is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we become a part of that city.

People promise us things all the time. Sometimes they keep their word. Other times they are not able to. God will never break His promises to you. Live in that confidence of His forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that He promises you through His Son, your Savior, Jesus Christ. In Christ, there is always hope.

Amen.

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Prayer of the Church
First Sunday in Advent
2 December A+D 2012

P Father in heaven, You once sent Your Son to us as our King, righteous and having salvation. Help all Your baptized people to wait in joyful hope for His appearing in glory and, by a faithful use of the means of grace, to prepare themselves for the coming Kingdom.

P God of our salvation, remember all pastors, teachers, and servants of the Church. Strengthen each one to hold forth faithfully the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus. We especially pray that you will pour out your Spirit on Moua Vang, that He may be your faithful servant. Grant all congregations to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, that the schemes of the evil one may come to nothing.

P Our God and Father, Your Son is the righteous Branch whom You sent to execute justice and righteousness on earth. Into Your loving hands we commend all entrusted with public service among us: our President, the Congress, our judges, all state and local governments, and all who serve in our armed forces. Give them courage and wisdom in their duties and guide them in paths that please You.

P Holy One of Israel, the words of Your Son do not pass away, but abide forever. Give us times of peace in this Advent season away from the busyness and hectic pace of our lives, to enter the quiet joy of Your presence that we might hear and ponder our Savior's words and so come to the Christmas feast with glad and joyful hearts.

P Lord, You teach the humble Your way. Remember in Your tender compassion all who pass through difficult and trying times: the hospitalized, the elderly, those taking treatments, the grieving and the lonely and all who have asked our prayers [*especially* _____]. Bring them the comfort of Your mercy and steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

P Father of glory, Your Son was welcomed into Jerusalem amid cries of "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" Grant that we may welcome Him anew today as He comes to us in His body and blood, bringing us the gift of peace with You and the promise of glory in the highest.

P Loving King, receive our thanks and praise for all whose hearts Your Son has established blameless in holiness before You, His God and Father: the faithful departed who even now abide in His presence and will appear with Him when He comes in glory, to raise the living and the dead. Grant that we may be faithful unto death that we also may receive with them the crown of everlasting life

P These things and whatever else You know us to need, most Holy Father, grant us for the sake of Him who is the Lord our Righteousness and who now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.