

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday In Advent, November 27, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 10, 134:1, 59:1-3, 343:1-4, 56:4.

Lessons: Jeremiah 33:1-13, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Matthew 22:41-46.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Most of the book of Jeremiah is a message which is hard to read and even harder to accept. Jeremiah was called by God to preach repentance to an ungodly nation in the hope that those who heard the message would repent. His calling throughout his 41-year ministry was also to proclaim certain judgment if they did not repent. This message from God would leave them without excuse so that in the future survivors of the terrible judgment from the Babylonian captivity might repent.

But the book of Jeremiah also gave believers among the nation that God had chosen an understanding of what God was doing, and would comfort the believers with the sure promises of the Lord.

Although thousands of Jews were carried off to captivity in Babylon during Jeremiah's life-time, during his ministry, we read today that

GOD PROMISES AGAIN TO FULFILL HIS GRACIOUS PROMISE

1. **A descendent of David “will do what is just and right”.**
2. **This man will save not only Judah, but all mankind – if only they believe!**

Jeremiah was under house arrest in the royal palace in Jerusalem at this time. As you heard in our Old Testament lesson, Jerusalem was under a curse and the city and its inhabitants would be destroyed. We heard God saying ***“I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness. Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.”*** Jeremiah 33:5-8 (NIV)

Then in our sermon text we find even more comfort, encouragement, and details of that healing that God will bring for Jerusalem, for Judah, for Israel, and for the whole world.

Today is the first day of the Advent season, the season we Christians use to prepare for the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ. The church year has been arranged to look especially at prophecies of the coming of the Savior. The first emphasis is on his first coming to earth, to be born of a virgin, to suffer, die, and rise again to bring eternal salvation. The Advent season also often takes a look at the second coming of Jesus Christ, when he will come to judge the living and the dead, and take all believers to heaven with him but will send all unbelievers to eternal damnation in hell.

Today we begin the Advent season with words of comfort. We have an eternal king whose concern and rule has us as a central interest.

Jeremiah plainly tells us about the days that are coming when the Lord will fulfill the promise made in the Garden of Eden when Satan, Eve, and Adam heard God say to Satan: ***“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*** Genesis 3:15 (NIV)

God had set apart the descendants of Abraham. They were called “Jews” and “the children of Israel”. They were called the “children of Israel” after Jacob, also was called “Israel”, who was the grandson of Abraham.

God had promised to give them the land of Canaan. And it was in that land of Canaan, in the little town of Bethlehem, called “the city of David”, which was little more than just “the town of David” by the time Jesus came, that the Savior of mankind, a descendant of the great king David would be born.

The land of Israel had been divided into two parts, scarcely deserving to be called “kingdoms”, called “Israel” and “Judah”. Things had been terrible for the people of Israel and Judah and would get worse. Why? They – by and large – had turned their backs on God, ignored the Word of God, disobeyed his laws and commands and even killed his prophets. And they had suffered for it. And they would suffer more for their sins of rejecting and ignoring God, the gracious, loving God who had done so much for them!

When you read the entire book of the prophet Jeremiah, you will see the wickedness of the people God had done so much for. Of course, this is also true as you read much of the Old Testament.

Yet scattered here and there in the book of Jeremiah, you will find encouraging and comforting promises from the gracious God, just as you heard when we read our sermon text.

You heard Jeremiah repeating words from the Lord: **“*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.*”** The Lord God speaks of **“the gracious promise”** he made to his chosen people.

This is a “good promise”, a “good word” and because God speaks it, it is a gracious word, full of his grace, full of his undeserved love and mercy. Not only is it good and gracious, it is a promise. And God keeps his promises. That is most obvious in the words of the New Testament, which tell us of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God.

This is a promise of grace, made first to all people in Genesis, even before Abraham lived, and God says here, specifically **“the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.”** That makes it very specific for the people to whom Jeremiah was preaching and pleading with to repent. God will do it!

“The days are coming, declares the LORD.” God does not say when, and it was about another 600 years after the days of Jeremiah that this promise was fulfilled. But the time is coming, despite how gloomy things looked for the people of Judah who would be carried into captivity in Babylon.

You see, Judah and Israel were kind of in the middle between Egypt and Babylon, two very powerful nations at that time who were fighting and seeking control over the land and the people between them. And of course, Judah and Israel were some of that land that was being fought over.

God says **“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.”** The line of David’s descendants was almost considered dead, much as we would expect that a tree that has been cut off at the ground would be dead and would never grow again. But God uses the picture of a sprout, a shoot, a branch growing out of that apparently dead line of the great king David’s descendants. Scripture elsewhere also uses this picture of a shoot, a branch of David’s line to describe the Savior.

And what was the importance of this tiny branch? **“In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.”** This picture meant something to believers in Jeremiah’s day. Many hearers saw their nations coming back to life. Many hearers saw salvation for what seemed important to them in an earthly sense.

But God promised infinitely more than just saving or restoring an earthly kingdom and city. God promised infinitely more than just living in safety in an earthly city.

God is much more specific: **“This is the name by which [the branch] will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”** This is nearly a word-for-word repetition of God’s Words ten chapters earlier: We read in chapter 23: **“The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.”** Jeremiah 23:5-6 (NIV)

The real marvel and wonder of God is Christ. Scripture speaks repeatedly about Christ and the salvation he will bring. This Righteous Branch, Jesus, the Christ, **“will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.”** David was dead and his line had been considered to be childless, yet God promised that one from David’s line would sit eternally on the throne, ruling an eternal kingdom. To be a descendant of David he must be a man, a Jew. To rule an eternal kingdom, he must be more than a man. Since there is only one who has eternal rule, and that is God, he

must also be God. This would be a miracle that the nearly extinct line of David would bring forth another king, who would be even greater than David. This would not be a wicked king, the kind from which Judah – and Israel – had suffered even in Jeremiah’s day. This would not be a wicked king like the rulers of Babylon. He would **“do what is just and right.”**

We read at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel: **“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.”** Matthew 1:1 (NIV) After sixteen verses defining the genealogy of Jesus Christ from Abraham through David to Mary, we read **“Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.”** Matthew 1:17 (NIV)

What comfort these words of Jeremiah give today! Think of the comfort they gave to believers in Jeremiah’s day, knowing that God would send a Savior, one who would redeem them from all their sins.

Think of the comfort these words give you personally.

We have an eternal king in Jesus Christ whose eternal concern and rule has us as a central interest. He watches over us in all our ways to keep us safe for himself. We have a priest in Jesus Christ who has a permanent priesthood, sealed by his own blood. **“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”** Hebrews 7:25 (NIV) We have the confidence that **“if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”** 1 John 2:1-2 (NIV)

Today you have heard again the promise of your Savior, the Son of David who came to earth to redeem you from hell, from eternal death and from sin.

May that Savior be always in your thoughts as you prepare for his coming! Amen.