

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Advent 1 – November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

**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. 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. 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.**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

My guess is that by now most of you have finished off the remnants of your Thanksgiving turkey. You may have some little pieces of turkey, but for the most part we've moved past Thanksgiving and plunged ourselves into the madness of preparing for the next holiday season. Christmas decorations are up inside and outside of all the stores. Daily, we receive the reminder only "X" number of shopping days left until Christmas. It tells you something when the day that ushers in all of this chaos and hustle and bustle is called "black Friday." I read a little story once about a woman who, in the middle of a typical December holiday rush, bought a box of 50 Christmas greeting cards without looking at what the message was inside them. She signed and addressed all but the very last card in the box, licked stamps on them, and pushed them into the mailbox, but she still hadn't looked to see what they said. A few days later she looked inside the box at the last card she had left and read the message for the first time. In perfect hallmark rhythm and rhyme it said:

*This little card is just to say  
A little gift is on the way.*

Somewhere out there, there were 49 people who were not going to get the little gift the little card promised.

Somehow it seems that all of the hoopla surrounding Christmas just cannot and does not deliver what it promises. TV adds promise that you'll find whatever toy you want under the tree. What actually happens is money is tight and mom lost the list and the presents aren't always there. College students can't wait to spend some time during the holidays with the "old friends" who they come to find are getting along just fine without them. Those beautiful pictures of families gathered around the table to celebrate often turns into renewed family arguments, too much "Christmas cheer" and football on the TV. The so-called "magic of Christmas" just can't deliver the things that are missing the other 11 months and 30 days of the year. So the Christmas season our society has created breaks its promises. Does that shock you? Every kind of Christmas promise that I just mentioned talks about the kind of promises people have been making and breaking ever since that first man and woman promised God they would leave that fruit alone. But Christmas--and I mean what really makes Christmas--isn't about the promises people make at all. Christmas is about a promise God made. And the season of Advent is what prepares us to receive what God has promised. This morning as we welcome in a new church year and begin the season of Advent, we look to the prophet Jeremiah to learn that

**Theme: Advent Shows How God Kept His Promise!**

- 1. To Raise Up The Righteous Branch**
- 2. To deliver his people**

You could say, actually, that the whole Bible is a book of promises. And this particular Word of God comes at the tail end of 5 solid chapters of promises that God made through His mouth-piece Jeremiah. The phrase that jumps out again and again from these chapters, in fact through all Jeremiah and the other

prophets, is, "**The days are coming...**" And what beautiful promises they were! Jeremiah writes in chapter 30, "**I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place. From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased. I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained. Their children will be as in the days of old, and their community will be established before me.**" All of that sounded really good, until we remember that when Jeremiah said all this, things were looking really bad. Jeremiah was a prophet to Judah. The current world power Babylon and its king Nebuchadnezzar had already raided Judah two times and at the time Jeremiah wrote these words, he was building siege works up the sides of the city wall. And Jeremiah was locked up inside the palace of the king. The king of Judah at the time was Zedekiah, who would turn out to be the last king of Judah, and his name meant "the Lord is my righteousness"--but this name hardly fit who he truly was. The Lord was hardly his righteousness; he is described in 2 Kings: "**He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.**" That background information will help us understand the kind of picture that Jeremiah is talking about here in chapter 33. Jeremiah writes, "**'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.' 'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line.'**"

If you've ever been hiking out in the woods, you've probably seen trees that long ago shot skyward, grew, matured, died, and have long since fallen over. Now these trees lie on the floor of the woods, decaying and returning to the soil. And very often it's out of the decaying pile of those fallen trees that the next generation of seedlings takes root. Those kinds of logs actually have a name: they're called "nurse logs." They provide the nutrients and the foundation for the next generation of trees that will dominate the woods.

That's kind of a picture of what the prophet Jeremiah was talking about. The mighty kingdom of Judah was a stump. Her former glory was gone, the power she had commanded back in the days of King David and Solomon 1000 years before Christ—that power had disappeared. God's people had turned away from him. There was practically nothing left. But listen to what Jeremiah says, "**'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.' 'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line.'**" Even though it looked like there was nothing left, out of this stump, God would raise up a righteous branch to fulfill his promise and bring salvation. "**The days are coming! Declares the Lord!**"

Advent is a season that looks back. We look back to prepare our hearts to greet our Savior King as he comes. Out of the stump of David, out of that line of fallen kings, God would send the King. And growing out of the manger in Bethlehem, the town of David, we see that Righteous Branch. Jesus came on that first Christmas. In complete contrast to what the former Kings of Judah had done, Jesus would do what God had wanted his kings to do. Jesus would do what was just and right. He would follow all of God's law completely. That's what God demanded from his people. Ever since Adam and Eve had sinned, mankind was incapable of doing this.

Even today, we can't follow God's law, we can't even keep our own minute promises. Yet God promised that he would send someone who would provide that protection. But Jeremiah said, "**The days are coming when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.**" What was the promise? 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. Better: "**He will do justice and righteousness in the land.**" He will establish that perfection I've been looking for all along. I am going to get the perfection I demand from that Person. Now do you see what we celebrate at Christmas? Advent show how God kept His promise! Remember what we sing in the hymn?

*Behold, a Branch is growing of loveliest form and grace, As prophets sung, foreknowing; it springs from Jesse's race...Isaiah hath foretold it (well Isaiah did too, but so did Jeremiah) In words of promise sure, And Mary's arms enfold it, A virgin meek and pure...*

The promise demanded perfection from that Child. Do you know what the Bible says? Jesus asked one time, "**Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?**" (John 8:46) and there was a whole group of His enemies who would have loved to, but they couldn't. St. Paul said, "**Christ had no sin.**" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the writer to the Hebrews said that "**He was in every way as we are, yet without sin.** (Hebrews 4:15) The promise demanded perfection--the Christ was all of that. Do you see why Simeon held that 40-day old baby in his arms and said, as one translation of the Bible puts it. "**Now Lord, you have kept your promise.**"

Advent is a season that also looks forward. Advent looks forward with joyful anticipation and hope to the second coming of our King. It is then that we will fully realize the second part of Jeremiah's prophecy. "**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.**" Look at a map sometime, and you'll see why Old Testament Israel and Judah seemed to be constantly at war. They were located on the natural land bridge that connected Africa to Europe and Asia. It was a very valuable piece of real estate. Everybody who wanted to get someplace else had to get there by going through them. But more so than real estate, Judah and Israel were under attack often because of their rebellion against the Lord. They did not possess the righteousness that God required from his people. They often turned against him and turned to other gods. So, how did God keep his promise of protection and safety? How did God ultimately deliver his people? He sent them the righteous Branch. Jesus came, not with physical protection and deliverance, but rather with spiritual protection and spiritual deliverance. Jesus helped Israel where it needed help the most! The Judah and Jerusalem Jeremiah talked about, ultimately, is us. We are God's new Israel. We are God's New Testament people. And Christ, the Branch from David's line, came to deliver us also.

Christ has given us the sign of our deliverance. He has given us his name, "**The Lord our righteousness.**" That name describes perfectly how Christ has delivered us. He has given us his righteousness. "The Lord our righteousness" is a name only He deserves to have, but by faith that righteousness is ours. "I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name; you are mine." "**Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**" (Romans 10:4) "**Christ has become for us wisdom from God -- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.**" (2 Corinthians 1:30)

And so in Advent, we look forward to the day when that deliverance will be complete. We look forward to the day when sin will no longer tempt us, when death will no longer pursue us, when Satan will be banished forever. On this first Sunday in Advent we ask Jesus to renew his presence in our hearts. We ask him again to come and rule in our lives, so that every day we thank and praise him keeping his promise!

Jesus of Nazareth is the little branch that found its way out of the ruined stump of Judah. Next time you're out in the woods and you see a row of seedlings growing out of a fallen tree, think of Jesus, the righteous Branch that grew from the fallen line of King David. From the broken stump of Judah God kept his promise and brought forth the Savior of the world. May the day when he returns again find you clothed in the Lord our Righteousness. Amen.