

Advent 1

November 28, 2021

Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹⁴ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

Psalms 25:1-9

- ¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my | trust in you;*
let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph | over me.
- ² Let none who look to you be | put to shame;*
let the treacherous be disappointed | in their schemes.
- ³ Show me your | ways, O LORD,*
and teach | me your paths.
- ⁴ Lead me in your | truth and teach me,*
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all | the day
long.
- ⁵ Remember, O LORD, your compas- | sion and love,*
for they are from | everlasting.
- ⁶ Remember not the sins of my youth and | my transgressions;*
remember me according to your love
and for the sake of your good- | ness, O LORD.
- ⁷ Gracious and upright | is the LORD;*
therefore he teaches sinners | in his way.
- ⁸ He guides the humble in | doing right*
and teaches his way | to the lowly.
- ⁹ All the paths of the LORD are | love and faithfulness*
to those who keep his covenant and his | testimonies.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one

another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Message: When Jesus Comes Again

This morning marks the first Sunday of Advent, the season in which for the church, time begins again. While we typically live with a fairly linear view of time – one event coming after another – the church's liturgical and lectionary calendar is cyclical – patterns of events repeating themselves. For this reason, the church year both ends and begins again with texts that speak of the end of time. The Omega – the end of all things – who closed out the year as Christ the King in Mark's gospel is now poised to reenter history in Luke's gospel as the Alpha – the beginning – the coming of the Christ-child and the dawn of a new age.

The rest of the world around us has been chomping at the bit to get to Christmas for months! TV commercials, store displays, and Hallmark channel movies have been prodding us forward with “’Tis the season” reminders before the Halloween costumes have even been stored away!

While it tends to leave us a bit breathless, the urge to rush into the joy of Christmas – however misunderstood that may be – is understandable. We long for anything to cheer us up. We continue to struggle with the ripples of Covid and the uncertainties of how best to restore a government and economy that flounder in its wake. Racial tensions simmer, threatening at any moment to boil over in yet another round of violence, and we question the very fabric of our judicial system when juries and judges make decisions which we are eager to second guess! It can all be so depressing, so with Christmas only three some odd weeks away, we’re tempted to jump on the band wagon of premature merriment.

But the church for 2000 years has contended that we’re not ready for Christmas yet; we’re not ready for the restoration of the throne of David. Sadly, in the wake of all the unrest, many Christians feel eager to welcome the Messiah as described and anticipated in the opening line of our Psalm:

*Don’t let me be humiliated; don’t let my enemies triumph over me.
Don’t let those who look to you be put to shame;
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.*

We think ourselves justified in longing for the ultimate return of Christ the King who will reign with justice! Finally, justice! Along with Jeremiah, we piously want to pray, “Execute justice and righteousness in the land!” Come, Lord Jesus, and let those evil doers finally get what’s coming to them!

But those self-righteous thoughts quickly give way to the underlying reality for both the prophet and the psalmist as we hear the rest of their messages. Jeremiah notes that the Righteous Branch which will spring up for David shall be known as the *Lord is my Righteousness*. Any righteousness he may have is not really his at all, but is an alien righteousness that belongs to God. The psalmist prays that when the promise is finally fulfilled that the Lord God would not remember the sins of the prophet’s youth and his transgressions, but would instead remember him according to God’s love and for the sake of the goodness of the Lord.

Advent is not a time to gleefully anticipate the arrival of God’s pending justice on “all those enemies and their schemes” with something like a Christian schadenfreude. It is a time for repentance, and repentance has nothing to do with all the things of which our neighbor is guilty! Advent, like

Lent, is one of those rare times when things really are all about us – about ourselves, not our neighbor.

Advent is a time to seriously reflect on what it will mean when Jesus comes again. On what basis will we welcome him? Is it based on how good we think we've been in comparison to the world around us? When we see people around us fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world, the powers of the heavens being shaken, and we see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory, on what basis will we "straighten up and raise our heads"? On what basis will we have the strength to stand before the Son of Man?

If this Advent we find ourselves longing for the day that Jesus will return to rule the world with justice, may the Holy Spirit grant us hearts that yearn instead for our God who will reign with love, compassion, and mercy.

Justice is about getting what we deserve.
Forgiveness is about not getting what we deserve.
Mercy is about getting what we don't deserve.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.
Amen.

Prayers of the Church

For the Church, the world, for one another, and for the sake of all people, let us pray to the Lord.

A brief silence

How precious is your love, dear Father, and how vast your mercy! You made solemn promises to Israel – and through them, to the world. In Jesus, your promises find their eternal Yes. Prepare our hearts for his threefold coming among us: As the Babe of Bethlehem, veiled in human flesh. As Head of the Church, veiled in word and sacrament. And as King of the universe, veiled only in robes of light and love, the glorious Yes who fulfills your ancient promises, and our eternal heart's desire.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Fill your Church with your Holy Spirit, so it may instruct sinners in your way. Strengthen it in holiness. Give it boldness to proclaim your Word that shall never pass away. Make it abound in love, especially when persecuted, so that its enemies do not exult, but instead repent and believe the Good News. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Jews, the flesh and blood kindred of Jesus and our elder brothers and sisters in faith. Banish hatred of them from every heart. Unite us with them in faith toward you and fervent love for one another, under the glorious and gentle rule of the Messiah.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Adorn this congregation with faith, love, mercy, generosity, and holiness. Turn our hearts and hands to adorn with these gifts all who are suffering.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Teach us to live at peace with each other. Help seek your will, not our own. Let us use whatever power and authority we have for the common good. Give wisdom, integrity, and common sense to our elected and appointed leaders, and to all who risk their lives in defense of liberty, justice, health, and peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We plead on behalf of everyone who needs your merciful care and glorious deliverance – especially Curt Behrens, Amy Cooper, Johnny Feulner, Marilyn Fredrick, Pauline Hansel, Mary Ann Helmrichs, Claire Littlefield, Les Ohl, Dean Puffett, Pr. James Puotyual, Mary Rathe, Dolores Rodela, Pr. David Steffenson, and the VansCoy family. Gladden their hearts, heal their bodies, uphold their spirits with your own Holy Spirit. Surround them with the love and care of all who hold them dear.

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, we entrust into your never-failing care our beloved dead. Ease the sorrow of those whose grief runs deep. Revive our spirits, direct our days and our deeds in your peace, and make us abound in love and in every good work. Strengthen our hearts with the gift of your Spirit, so that we may be blameless at the coming of Jesus. And gather us, with all the redeemed, into your eternal Kingdom, where we shall rejoice in your goodness and righteousness forever.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.