

Text: Jeremiah 33: 14-16; Luke 21: 25-35

Title: the Hope in which we place our trust

Date: November 29, 2009 First Sunday in Advent

In a many ways, Advent is the ultimate “bad news, good news” scenario. Good news without the dark backdrop of bad news quickly fades into insignificance, lost in the clutter of our daily lives. Salvation makes no sense if there is nothing to be saved from, right? so it makes all the sense in the world to start with Jeremiah.

We really don't talk too much about Jeremiah, which is really too bad for he is the prototypical prophet. He experiences a supernatural call, compelling him to speak God's words to people who did not want to hear what God had to say. Let me give you the geo political background. About 130 odd years before, the Assyrians had invaded out of the north and had erased the northern Kingdom of Israel from the map and history. Her people were marched away and dispersed throughout the empire, never to be heard from again. For over 100 years the Judean kings have been keeping the peace by paying tribute, first to the Assyrians, then to the Babylonians. Tribute sounds so much nicer than what it is, a bribe not to be invaded; it sounds almost legitimate, like taxes. Anyway, in the wake of Babylon taking over the Assyrian Empire , there was a perceived power vacuum in the Near East. The Babylonians were busy in the North and the Egyptians were organizing under a new Pharaoh. Jerusalem was just about at the limits of either one of these superpower's reach. Maybe we can play both of these giants against one another. Add a pinch of nationalism, and the Kings advisors and professional prophets were urging him to suspend tribute to Nebuchadnezzar. “God made a promise to our ancestor David, there is no way that God is going to let the Babylonians depose you” said the court prophets. If Nebuchadnezzar invades then Pharaoh Neco will see this as an opportunity to invade and will scare him off!” into this mess waded Jeremiah. Don't Do IT! God is going to use the Babylonians to punish you for all the religious hypocrisy. These court prophets do not speak for God- they are telling you only what they think that you want to hear. They say that we are about to enter an unparalleled period of prosperity. It's just the opposite. You are already doomed- you have pushed God too far.

As you can imagine, this message did not make Jeremiah the most popular guy on the block. We catch up to him sitting in the dungeon, jailed for his prophecies. If anyone has any right to feel hopeless, it's Jeremiah. Not only is he cooling his heels in Jail, he knows without a doubt that his city is doomed, that the Babylonians will come and burn everything and those they don't kill will be marched off into exile. This is the darkest night- and here is the good news he is given

The coming destruction will not be the end. God will not turn his back on his people. There will be a new dawn and God will provide a righteous ruler who fulfill both the letter and the spirit of God's promises to David. He will rule with God's righteousness and all of his people will experience themselves as righteous as a result- to the point that Jerusalem will now be known as righteous. The repetition is not accident- the king shall rule and the people exemplify all that is in Moses and the prophets, they will be faithful in all of their relationships, they will uphold the poor and downtrodden. A community of people that defines itself as "the Lord is our righteousness" understands itself to be delivered and redeemed by the Lord and commits itself to live the way God would have us live. Sound Familiar? In the darkness of that dungeon, God let Jeremiah see into the future and see people like us and that hope sustained him. We call ourselves Christians after the one who redeemed and made us righteous. Jeremiah saw the effects of the First Advent.

Advent is not just another way to say X shopping days to Christmas (25, if you are keeping count...) Advent means Arrival- the Arrival of the Messiah. But we are people who are living between the Advents. Like the people living in Jerusalem in 586BC, we are concerned with geopolitical challenges. Just last week everyone has fessed up to what everyone knew- that Iran is working to get the Bomb and doesn't care what anyone thinks! Here's a nightmare- we know that Israel has nukes and we also know that Iran funds and trains Hamas. Let's say that Israel bombs the Iranian plant and a pilot get captures or Hamas kidnaps a general and ships him off to Iran for a show trial- What will Israel do? Meanwhile over in Pakistan, the president who is under investigation for corruption has declared that he will hand over control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons to the prime minister, who is directly elected by the people. all of this in a country whose military and intelligence organizations have been in bed with the

Taliban until the Taliban crossed the line and the the army declared war on them. Can you imagine a scenario in which a Taliban friendly prime minister hand them the keys to the nuclear arsenal?

I am not sharing this in order give you sleepless nights or to rain on your holiday season- it's just that our situation can be seen as dark and hopeless as Jeremiah's. Gee, I'd even trade him. his worse case scenario was the destruction of Jerusalem, our worst case scenario is WW3 triggered by nutcases who hate each other in the name of God. Where is the light of our hope?

Same place that Jeremiah found it. Jeremiah has a vision of the First Arrival, the first Advent, the First Coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. This was something beyond his capacity to imagine, that God would send One that is as righteous as He is- for the Messiah, the Promised One is none other than the Second Person of the Trinity.

We have a tremendous advantage over Jeremiah- for we can imagine the second coming. After all, we already know about the first. Luke has Jesus explaining that all of these fears that we have, the wars and rumors of wars are just part of the birth pangs- all part of what must be.

The good news in all of this is that we do not have to worry. No matter how things may look to be out of control, they are never put of God's control. The Second Advent will come in God's own time. Till then, do not lose hope. Personally I find it striking that there is a warning against falling into what looks like nihilism- the notion that existence is senseless and useless, that there is no right and wrong, and you might as well destroy it all. Almost all of the kids involved in school shootings have been nihilists. "Don't lose hope," we are told – "don't lose hope" Jeremiah was told- for the Messiah is coming.

Until then, until he comes again, we will continue to do what we are called to do- to live as God's righteous- for our Lord is righteous and his righteousness is imputed to us. The Promise to Jeremiah has already come true- the Branch of David has already sprung. Let us prepare our hearts for His Second coming even as we celebrate his first.