

**The First Sunday in Advent**  
**December 3, 2017**  
**Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church**  
**Farmington, NM**

**Jeremiah 33:14-16** “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.’ (ESV)

**“Anticipation of Salvation”**

The tree is up. The lights have been hung. Black Friday bargains have been purchased. Now what? Unless you have superhuman shopping abilities and abnormal dedication to preparation, there is still more to be done. More decorating. More shopping. More baking and wrapping and planning. But the biggest thing we can't help but do right now is wait. That's the worst part. The most excruciatingly painful part. Waiting.

But there is also joy in our waiting. Right now there are only possibilities. This could be the best Christmas ever. There is so much potential. There could be so many presents under that tree. The anticipation brings joy to our hearts and excited smiles to our faces. Joy fills our lives. But it is the joy of what could be.

Advent helps us celebrate what's coming, to know what it is and hold in tension the not yet. Jeremiah holds out for us the perfect message challenging us to look beyond the obvious to the ultimate. Jeremiah's words of prophecy build up in us the anticipation of salvation.

Lots of people use this time of anticipation to bring a different kind of joy than the most expected, the easiest and most comfortable. We do our best to think of others, instead of just ourselves. The toy barrel outside the coffee shop gives us a gentle nudge. The bell ringer outside the store gives us a reminder. We teach children to explore ways they can be thoughtful toward their siblings and be generous toward other children who don't have as much as we do.

Jeremiah uses an interesting phrase to build our anticipation to think of the big picture. God declares: **“the days are coming.”** (Jeremiah 33:14) Then follows it up by pointing ahead: **“in those days.”** (Jeremiah 33:15,16) Whenever you hear that phrase, especially in the prophets of the Old Testament, but also in the prophetic pronouncements of Jesus, you can think of the package delivery truck. You place an order or someone sends you a gift. And you get a notice that lets you know you can track that package. If you click on that link to see where it is from the shipping department to the delivery truck to your front door. “That day” or “in those days” signals that the delivery will happen. We just can't always predict the exact time and date. We just know it is going to happen. And these words from God through Jeremiah point us to God's

delivery of our ultimate joy. Our ultimate joy will come from the one who is the fulfillment of God's promises. That's what we are anticipating.

Maintaining focus, though, when those days could be a long time in coming can be quite a challenge. Just ask any elementary school teacher about jittery, distracted children in the weeks leading up to Christmas. You have your own plans to worry about. You have to make Christmas memorable and special for your loved ones. You know what you need to do. You need to spend. You need to give. You need to do. You need to be there for them, be there with them. If you can provide those special experiences with those special people, then you can find the joy you are anticipating. For Christians this joyful anticipation easily turns into irritation. You feel all this pressure. You have to do everything and be everything and give everything for everyone or else, Christmas will be ruined.

And there's another irritation for Christians this time of year. How many times do you have to hear someone say "happy holidays" before you start correcting their political correctness? How much non-religious, non-sectarian, bland and vague artwork will you have to put up with? How many greeting cards and holiday songs and inoffensive decorations do you have to witness before you blow your top? It's hard to keep your focus on those days and that promise when Christ has been removed from Christmas all around us.

Let's rotate the snow globe a moment here and analyze this issue from another angle. What would happen if everyone greeted you with a 'Merry Christmas'? Would everything be fixed if Jesus was more obvious in our songs and symbols? Would all our problems be solved if this season wasn't dominated by buying and selling and getting and giving? Those might all be steps in the right direction. But we're still just fixated on the obvious and not the ultimate joy.

We can see that from the perspective of Jeremiah's original audience. God gave this promise to the residents of Jerusalem through his prophet Jeremiah, because, well basically, they weren't paying attention. He had sent prophet after prophet to warn them about their idolatry and unfaithfulness. They ignored them. Now that God had sent the Babylonian army to lay siege to the city, they were actually paying attention. But instead of turning to the Lord, they just assumed all hope was lost. Now, what would happen if they did get everything they wanted? If the enemy armies surrounding their city all went away, would their problems all be gone? If the siege was lifted and Jerusalem could return to the way things used to be, would that give them real hope?

No, their example is a lesson for us today. God is pointing them ahead to his deliverance: **"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. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely."** (Jeremiah 33:15,16) My outrage and my expectations just mask my shortcomings. My anticipation mismanagement reveals the fulfillment I really need. My

preparations and plans, my idea of potential and possibilities require me to look beyond the obvious to the ultimate.

I'd like to let you in on a key principal for understanding prophecy in the Bible. It's called prophetic perspective. It works like your view of mountain ranges off in the distance. If you go up to a nice hill with a great view, you can look toward the mountains. From your perspective, those mountains look like they are right on top of each other, only fractions of an inch apart. But one mountain range might be 50 miles away while another might be 100 miles away. That's the way prophecies work. We sometimes think they are just within reach. But in reality, their fulfillment might be way down the road. And maybe Jeremiah didn't even know that some of the words from God he was sharing would come true in the next few months while others wouldn't come true until the coming of Jesus and still others wouldn't be accomplished until Jesus comes back at the end of time. That's prophetic perspective.

God's promise to send a "righteous Branch" sounds a little, well a little too little too late. But at this time, it appeared that the royal family of David was completely cut off. There was no hope for any king to rise to recapture lost territory and reclaim the throne in Jerusalem. David's royal line was a worthless stump. It would take a miracle for any life to come out of that stump. Which is exactly what God was promising. A new heir coming from David's family would take a miracle. This Branch from God coming out of David's royal house would reach beyond Israelite expectations to bring ultimate peace and security.

So the prophetic perspective provided by Jeremiah points us beyond the obvious to find joy in this Branch who will come. If we stick with the words from Jeremiah, we realize he must be a real human being, coming from the physical family of David. But he must be more than just a mere human being. To accomplish the things required of him and to share what he promises, he must also be divine.

The Branch to complete the promise must "execute justice." Justice means the penalty must fit the crime. Justice is coming down for all the times when I fail to listen to God's word of warning. Justice awaits me for all the times I'm too busy or too distracted to keep my focus on God's promise of ultimate deliverance. But that justice executed by the Branch means the punishment for my sins, the consequence for every one of my infractions was handed down against Jesus when he was sentenced to death on the cross. Jesus executed righteousness everywhere he went. And when the sentence of the cross was carried out and Jesus did his time in the tomb, he rose to bring his righteousness all across the land. Liberation comes from your Branch who gave himself up as your sacrifice. Security comes to your soul because of his defeat of sin and hell.

One of the most important words in these verses is one of the hardest to translate. In fact, the translation we usually use, the NIV, doesn't even try. But it's the first word in verse fourteen: "Behold!" Other translations say "Look." Basically, it means stop everything you're doing and fix your complete attention on this one thing. And that is one of the biggest blessings we get when we have an Advent focus to our lives. Stop.

Take a deep breath. Push pause on whatever you've got going on. Now focus. God says: **"I will fulfill the promise I made...I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up."** Jeremiah 33:14,15 God is the one who is acting and delivering. You need do nothing other than sit back and soak it all in. Then experience the blessings coming from the Branch: **"he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."** (Jeremiah 33:15) Jesus does the work. You get to enjoy the fruits of his labor. You get the results: rescue and security. You are only as secure as the person standing behind that promise of safety. When it's another person, or even yourself, that security is flimsy, at best. When it is God, your Savior, that's a valid source of confidence.

When you look beyond the obvious, you get ultimate joy. The name earned by Jesus says it all: **"The Lord is our righteousness."** (Jeremiah 33:16) Jesus was completely righteous by his perfect life. Jesus shares his righteousness with souls in need, souls without a righteousness of their own. Jesus does all the righteous requirements of the Lord. Then Jesus makes you righteous to stand guiltless and holy before your God. Jesus has already made your Christmas perfect. Jesus has done it all. Jesus did all the doing and all the giving and all the being there.

Behold your Branch! He makes you righteous. He gives you something worth waiting for. He gives you the ultimate beyond the obvious. Jesus even takes the irritation out of holidays. Did you know that "holiday" is just the shortened form of "holy days." A holy day developed in countries that were predominantly Christian when they took the day off and dedicated that day to God. So a holiday was a time to focus on God's gifts to us. Even X-Mas brings us joy. Did you know that way of abbreviating the celebration on December 25th was started by Christians? You get a hint when you look at the cover of that red hymnal in front of you. The X overlaid with what looks like a P are actually the first two letters of Christ in the Greek language. You get Christ and you get his real presence in human flesh and blood coming to you at X-Mas. There's no reason to let anyone rob you of your joy. Instead you can let your joy be infectious. When you focus on the Lord your righteousness, the coming of the Branch, you have anticipation of salvation. Amen.