

Rev. Shaun Arndt
Sunday, December 1, 2024
Jeremiah 33:14-16

“Hope Grows”

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people... (just) as he said through his holy prophets of long ago. Amen. Dear friends in Christ,

Beneath the beautiful grove of trees, fresh air fills your lungs. Soft breezes make a delightful show as sun and shade dance beneath rippling leaves. Sweet bird songs fill the air. What life! What beauty!

But no more. All is bleak and desolate, cut and burned. There are only ashes and charred stumps. No life, no hope.

Wait. There is a glimpse of green. A strong, healthy branch rises out of the ruin. As this **Branch** grows, **Hope Grows**. Not hope as in a fond wish, but hope, as in looking forward to what most certainly will happen!

Indeed, this **Branch** will create not a single tree, or new woods, but a whole new world greater than all before, filled with joy beyond imagination! The very air will be so pure and exhilarating the very act of breathing will be a delight! It will be like a million, no a billion glorious springs breaking forth all at once after a bleak and dark winter.

This is the beautiful picture that the Holy Spirit has packed into this amazing promise God makes in our first lesson: **I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David's line.** With this **Branch, Hope Grows**. That's what it meant for believers in Jeremiah's day, and that's what it still means to us.

It was about 600 years before Christ's birth, when like the grove in my little parable, Jerusalem and Judah had been cut down, torn apart, smashed and burned – literally.

Just before our reading we hear this: **the houses of this city... were being torn down to build up defenses against the siege ramps and the sword during the fight against the Chaldeans...** Because of Israel's sin and Judah's rebellion, the Babylonians were attacking and besieging Jerusalem. Soon they would destroy the city and take the people 1,000 miles away into captivity.

And this would be the result: **This place is a wasteland, without man or animal, and that there is no man living in the cities of Judah or in the desolate streets of Jerusalem, not even an animal.**

Because of sin in a sinful world, countless lives are turned upside down. Hopes and dreams cut down like a tree to a stump. The shock and pain filling hearts must have been numbing.

And then there were all the spiritual issues! Where was God in all this? More than that, how could God's Word be true? How could the promise of the Savior ever come true? How could the Messiah be born in Bethlehem when the people of promise were now carried away and scattered among the nations? How could the Savior be a king like David when the Kings of Israel were no more?

Perhaps they had gone too far, sinned too much and the Lord had utterly abandoned them. All their hopes... cut off.

Except, that is, for the one hope that will never disappoint: The Word of God. The Lord had made a promise. And when God makes a promise, He always keeps it, no matter how hopeless things look! And so God spoke to His people through the prophet Jeremiah to make **Hope Grow** in their hearts.

And so **Hope Grows** in the **desolate wasteland** as the prophet lifted his voice: **Listen, the days are coming, declares the LORD...** Pay attention! Lift your eyes away from the ruins and focus on what God has told you in His Word!

The days are coming when I will fulfill the good promises that I have spoken to the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah. See, the Lord will always do what He has said. He always keeps His promises. And so He would bring the people back from exile, back from distant Babylon.

In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David's line. He will establish justice and righteousness on earth.

Here Jeremiah repeats a promise given more than a century earlier through the prophet Isaiah. Though the mighty tree of the kings of Israel had been chopped off, God would make a new **Branch** come forth, descended from **David's** family. David's royal line still lived and would continue until a virgin named Mary from the family of David gave birth to the Savior King.

This **righteous Branch** has a capital **B**, because it is a name for the promised Savior. It is a name for Jesus! He is both descended from **David's line** and is at the same time David's eternal Lord, God the Son. That's why Jesus would do what no Israelite King had ever done. He would be perfect and do what was **right** all the time and therefore He would rescue His people:

In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. This is not a promise of secure borders, or rescue from enemy nations for a mere generation or two. This is a promise of a rescue that will extend into all eternity, a peace with God in sins forgiven that leave death defeated and break forth into a new world of endless peace.

This is what she will be called – she refers to **Jerusalem** (a feminine noun in Hebrew), **Jerusalem**, that is, God’s people, the Bride of Christ – **she will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.**

This is a fascinating name for God’s people! **The LORD Our Righteousness** is a name already mentioned once before in the book of Jeremiah, back in chapter 23:6. But there it is a name for the **Righteous Branch**. It is a name for the Savior! Which makes sense after all, because He is true God, **the LORD** and He is **Our Righteousness** – that is He makes sinners right in the sight of God by giving them the credit for His perfect life and by removing all their sin and guilt.

But in this verse, **Jerusalem**, God’s people bears the Savior’s Name! How can that be? Because He gives Himself and all that He has won to His believing people. He is the **Christ**, we are **Christians** – clothed with His holiness through faith. His **righteousness** is now **our righteousness**, as in your **righteousness**- your right standing before God.

Yes, you. Because the rest of the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible make it clear this promise in our lesson was not just for Old Testament Jerusalem, but it also includes us. Judah and Jerusalem become the name for all of God’s Church, His people whom He has saved, His people with whom He lives, His people who He will make to **dwell securely**.

So what makes you feel cut down, like hope has been reduced to a charred stump? Is it loneliness or the recent, or not so recent loss of that loved one that casts a dark shadow across life, especially as you enter the holidays in a time of grieving? Is it issues within the family? Struggles at work or finding work? The bully who is always there making life miserable?

Is it the bad news and chaos of the world around us? The decline of Christian churches in what’s labeled ‘a post Christian world?’ The stress of getting it all done? The disappointments and heartaches that stack up?

Is it guilt? The mess our own making, the way we blew it. Was it too far? Will God abandon you?

Is it shame? The hurts and wrongs that others have caused against you that leave you feeling polluted and unlovable?

Though our homes may not be in ashes and our population may not be hauled off in exile to Babylon, I think there are many ways with which we can relate to the believers in Jeremiah’s day. We too are sinners living in a sinful and pain filled world. And the devil wants to use these things to make us doubt and wonder if He doesn’t love you, He isn’t faithful.

But still into the **desolate wastelands** of a broken world the Lord’s voice calls out in His Word and by Word and Sacrament, **Hope Grows**. Still the voice of the prophet comes with

promise to you and me today: **Listen, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the good promises that I have spoken...**

Remember how when all seemed hopeless, God did the impossible to keep His promises. He moved the nations to release Judah from exile, so that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem – born of a human mother, but not a human father, the Sinless One born from Sinful Humanity – the one who is our flesh and blood and yet is the eternal God. **I will cause a righteous Branch to grow up from David's line. He will establish justice and righteousness on earth.**

The God who ruled all history to keep the promise of Jesus born to save us still rules all history to keep His promises to you. After all, He already moved nations to bring you to a baptismal font, so that Jesus, **The LORD Our Righteousness** would give you His own Name and blameless status before God, so that joined to His death and resurrection by water and Word you like Jerusalem in our lesson are called: **The LORD Our Righteousness.**

Clearly the God who raises the dead to make all that happen to declare you forgiven and dear to Himself, will also keep all the other promises too: to turn even the sorrows and troubles we face now out for our eternal good, above all by teaching us to rely on His promises.

The God who kept His promise and raised up **Jesus Christ, the Righteous Branch from David's line** will also keep His final promise that is the ultimate answer to every trouble, grief and struggle you face.

He will usher in that day when He comes in glory to bring an end to all sadness and struggle, when there will be no more curse, no more thistles or death, only life and glory for God's people in that new and perfect world where, the very air will be so pure and exhilarating the very act of breathing will be a delight! It will be like a million, no a billion glorious springs breaking forth all at once after a bleak and dark winter.

In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And yes that means you, just as it means all believers.

Hang on dear believer. Keep watching. Cling to His Word. God is faithful. The eternal spring will soon break through the dark night of sin. Because God has kept His promise to **cause that righteous Branch, Jesus, to grow up, Hope Grows** and blooms for all eternity. Amen.

The one who testifies to these things says: "Yes, I am coming soon." 'Amen. Come Lord Jesus.' Amen.

We confess our confidence in the Lord who keeps all His promises, using the Apostles' Creed on page 6 of the worship folder.