

INI

Jeremiah 33,14-16

Advent 1 — 29 November 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Old Testament Lesson from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, which was read earlier:

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Judah and the house of Israel. In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth, and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the earth.”

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: The news does not seem to get better, does it? Economic crises rage throughout the financial markets of the world. Solutions which are offered are best guesses of the top minds. There is the old joke: what would happen if you laid all the economists of the world end to end? You wouldn't reach a conclusion.

War rages and terror strikes from an enemy which openly defies the true God.

But things could be worse. Politically, economically, and socially speaking things could get worse — but who knows.

In Jeremiah's days, however, things were worse. They were worse

for God’s Old Testament people because they were on the brink of seeing their economic, political, and social order being swept away.

Jeremiah is better known as a prophet of doom and gloom. But He also spoke words of hope. These words pointed to better days ahead. Days for which we prepare in this Advent season.

This brings me to today’s sermon theme, “**Jeremiah Brings Consolation In The Midst Of Devastation.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) In Jesus ... Better Days Were Coming;**
- 2) In Jesus ... Better Days Have Come;** and,
- 3) In Jesus ... A Better Day Is Coming**

1) In Jesus ... Better Days Were Coming. Traditionally, these chapters in the Book of Jeremiah are known as “The Book of Consolation.” But the consolation that Jeremiah was bringing had nothing to do with Jeremiah himself nor did it lie in the hands of his hearers.

Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry spanned decades, and as he said these words, his ministry was nearing an end. He was speaking in and to Jerusalem in about 587 BC, while the city itself was under siege by Babylonian armies under King Nebuchadnezzar.

The Babylonian siege was the culmination of God’s judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been dissolved with the Assyrian conquest of 722 BC. Both kingdoms were being destroyed for the same reasons: apostasy, falling away from belief in the One, True God, worshiping other gods, and a host of social sins that God had specifically prohibited.

Now imminent destruction loomed. In spite of the politicking of

the princes and kings, nothing could avert this destruction. Why? Because destruction was part of God’s judgment upon His unrepentant and unbelieving Old Testament people.

In the face of this impending doom, Jeremiah brought from God some words of comfort.

With the coming destruction, the kingship would surely be gone – and it was. But God promised that He would cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth. Furthermore, there always would be someone of David’s line to sit on David’s throne.

With the coming destruction, the southern kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed, and this destruction would include the Temple in Jerusalem, the place where God said He would meet His people. But God promised that all this would be saved and that the city would even get a new name: “The Lord Is Our Righteousness.”

Especially with the coming destruction of the Temple, the Levitical priesthood, so to speak, would be unemployed and have nothing to do, since there would be no God-ordained altar on which to sacrifice. But God promised that there always would be a priesthood to offer up sacrifices to Him.

The question for Jeremiah’s listeners — although it is clear that most did not want to hear — should have been: When? How?

The “when” is given: “Behold, the days are coming,” and “in those days.” Yes, doom and destruction would come, but God’s promise would be secure even in the midst of devastation. The people, however, would have to wait to see exactly when God would bring about better days.

The “how” is implied. In fact, it is not so much a “how” but a

“Who.” As we read Jeremiah, as well as the rest of the Old Testament, God makes it clear that the fulfillment of His promises will find their realization in but One Person — the Messiah.

There is only One in Whom all of God’s promises regarding an everlasting king, an everlasting city of promise, and an everlasting priesthood can be fulfilled. All of God’s promises to Jeremiah tell us that in Jesus, better days were coming.

But as we unfold these promises, we also see that:

2) In Jesus ... Better Days Have Come. God promised that in His good time He would “cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth.” Here we have the picture of new growth.

But at the time of Jesus, the line of David as a line to the kingship had died out. To be sure, there were still people who could trace their ancestry to David, but these were of zero political and regal importance. It is like looking a genealogical tree and saying that 500 or 600 years ago I could trace my ancestry back to a king of England or a prince in Germany. So what? That was then – this is now.

But out of political and social insignificance, God would raise up a new king from David’s line. Moreover, this Branch would be righteous, that is, holy and sinless before God.

There is only One in all of history who fits this description: Jesus. Born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who herself was descended from David, Jesus was God from all eternity, and thus possessed God’s holiness and sinlessness according to His divine nature. As Jesus had no human, earthly father, He also possessed from the moment of His conception the full holiness and sinlessness which Adam had before the fall into sin.

Throughout His earthly life, Jesus actively and passively lived a life of holiness and sinlessness. Jesus took His holiness and sinlessness to the Cross, and there took upon Himself the sins of all. He took those sins into death for you and me so that we might be forgiven. He died once for all.

There on the Cross the Roman governor placed an inscription: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Before His death, Pilate asked Jesus whether Jesus was a king. Jesus, in effect, said “yes,” but added that His Kingdom was “not of this world.”

His is a Kingdom that is within the world but not of the world. It is a Kingdom of Grace and Forgiveness and Reconciliation to God. It is a Kingdom secured through His sacrifice on the Cross and made real with His resurrection from the dead on the third day.

But what are we to make of Jerusalem? The Jerusalem of Jesus’ day was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 — again in accord with God’s Word because she had rejected God’s Son, the Messiah, Jesus.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, promises to give Jerusalem a new name (Isaiah 62,2 ff). Here we see that Jerusalem is no longer to be called “Forsaken” but rather “My Delight is In Her,” and she is no longer to be called “Desolate” but “Married.” She is to be the bride and the Messiah, Jesus, the bridegroom.

What in the New Testament fits this description? It is the Church, Christ’s body.

Her name, then, does not reflect what she has done, but rather what Christ has done for her and how He has earned for her a name. Christ’s righteousness then is declared to be her righteousness.

So too with a never ending priesthood. Who is fit to offer perfect, eternal sacrifices to God? The Letter to the Hebrews answers this question for us:

Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. ¹³ For the One concerning Whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. ¹⁵ And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is attested of Him [that is, Jesus], “You are a Priest forever | according to the order of Melchizedek.” ¹⁸ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. ²⁰ And inasmuch as it was not without an oath ²¹ (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, | “the Lord has sworn | and will not change his mind, | ‘You are a Priest forever’”); ²² so much the more also Jesus has become the Guarantee of a better covenant. ²³ The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, ²⁴ but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. ²⁵ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7,11-25)

In Jesus, better days indeed have come. He is the eternal king who rules His church in grace and truth and forgiveness and is an eternal priest always making intercession for us.

Finally:

3) In Jesus ... A Better Day Is Coming. With Jesus, a better day is here, but a better day is also coming.

Jesus draws near to us through His Word, proclaimed in the Church, and through Baptism and Holy Communion, again given through the Church.

We are in His Body because he has called us through His Word — and for most of us that meant Baptism. Here He washed away our sins by drowning us in His death and raising us unto newness of life in His resurrection.

He gathers us around His Communion table to share with us His true Body and Blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

His Church is holy not because she is without sins on account of her own efforts. Her members are holy, but not on account of their own efforts. The Church and her members are holy because of what Jesus has done and what He has declared her to be: His holy and unspotted bride for whom He makes continual intercession.

There are those, however, who look at these verses as promising an earthly, Messianic reign of Jesus. They say the Temple and its sacrificial system with priests and animals will have to be rebuilt. The earthly Jerusalem will be Jesus' throne from which He will reign.

This view, however, completely misses what Jesus has done. He has died, once for all for all time. With His death and resurrection, he

abolished all the Old Testament animal sacrifices. If these were again to be reinstated, then why did Jesus die? This view of an earthly kingdom of glory with a real Temple and real sacrifices completely misunderstands the nature of Jesus' sacrifice for us and is contrary to the clear words of Scripture: "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Jesus did not promise a new earthly Jerusalem, but a heavenly one, where there will be no more crying, pain, or death. The old things has passed away.

He promised an earthly Kingdom of Grace and Forgiveness, secure in His body, the Church. Here He mediates the forgiveness of sins in a world which is perishing on account of sin and death.

Conclusion: Yes, the world is troubled. It goes through various crises, economic, political, and social. Its crises are the result of fallen, sinful man, whose first parents gave to the world sin and death.

But into this world came our King of grace and forgiveness, our High Priest, Jesus. He made the one and all-atoning sacrifice for sin, so that in the midst of earthly trouble we might have peace with God, and as forgiven sinners look to that better and brighter day to live with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, world with out end. Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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