

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The Days are Coming

It hasn't been a good year for football in the state of Michigan, has it? It seems all our teams are either rebuilding or underachieving. Yet what does each team tell us? ***"The days are coming."*** "We'll see," is the cynical response we might give, especially with respect to our pro team, that has said as much for so long. ***"The days are coming."*** Yeah, sure.

In our lesson today God says a similar thing to His weary people, ***"The days are coming."*** The big difference is that God is robed in righteousness and glory, not Honolulu blue and silver. He can keep His promises and there is no one who can get in His way.

Jeremiah was a prophet sent to fail from an earthly point of view. From the outset, God told Jeremiah he'd be mocked and largely ignored or rejected. The great majority would want nothing to do with him, his message, his morality, or his God, the only true God. So why even bother? Because some would listen. Some did remember the promises of old and were waiting for their fulfillment. God sent Jeremiah to this remnant and to all who would hear to tell them *the days are coming*.

Today we enter the Advent season. Advent means coming. It is a time of preparation, of hope, of expectation. We Christians, like that Jewish remnant, live surrounded by people who want nothing to do with us, our morality, our message, or our God, the only true God. Still today, the Church is often mocked, ignored, and rejected. God's people can be tempted to lose hope. Therefore we gather together, we huddle around the pulpit, the altar, and the font. We gather to be reminded of God's promises. We gather to hear from the Heavenly Father about the coming of His Son.

"The days are coming." The days are coming for the advent of God's promise. God is a God of His Word. When He says something, it is as good as done. This point is especially clear in the Hebrew. The Hebrew language has what is called a prophetic perfect. The prophetic perfect is the use of a past tense to speak about a future event. For instance, instead of saying, "God will take me to heaven," in Hebrew I could say, "God has taken me to heaven," even though it hasn't happened yet. The point is that when God promises something, it is going to happen whether people like it or not. ***"God is not a man that He should lie nor can He do so."*** When God makes a promise, it is coming.

Jeremiah here focuses on one promise in particular. ***"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."*** What is that promise? He tells us, ***"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."***

Christ is this righteous Branch. To the Old Testament Jews God promised Christ would come to be crucified and raised. As we all know, that has now already happened. God kept His promise. Christ brought judgment and righteousness. He took our sins and gave us His righteousness. For Christ's sake we have been judged and declared not guilty. Yet we New Testament Christians now also await another coming. It is this coming which is really the focus of Advent.

It is a common misunderstanding that Advent is a time to get ready for Christmas. Yes, Advent precedes Christmas in the Church year, but it is primarily a time to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ. The second lesson and Holy Gospel spoke of this coming, and our sermon text does as well. ***“The days are coming.”***

So are we living like people eagerly expecting the coming of their King? What will our Savior find when He returns? Will we be ready or will we blush and tremble? Will we be clearly discernible as the children of the heavenly Father, or will it be hard to tell us apart? Will our faith be evident in deeds? Will our words be salt and light? Will our thoughts be consistent with God’s expressed will? Will we be chasing after the wind, or will we be seeking after God in the Word and the Sacraments? These are the questions that Advent asks. This is why next week Christ will warn us in the Holy Gospel:

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. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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.

It is interesting to note that there are two colors for Advent. Some churches use purple. Purple is a color of repentance and preparation. This advent and every advent we repent and prepare for the coming of our Lord, whenever that may happen. Blue is also a color for advent. It is the color of hope. Hope implies a confident trust that something better is coming. In Advent we repent and prepare, but we also confidently hope.

Three of our four children have come late. Who knows if number five will get her on time in July? And when a child is past due, it’s easy for the parents to wonder, “How much longer? It seems like it’s been forever.” With Ana, based on our previous experiences, we were sure there’d be that wait, that we’d have plenty of time before she came, but she surprised us. Before we knew it, she decided to make her big entrance. We barely made it into the hospital room before she was born. The nurse wanted to know why I hadn’t gotten Tricia to the hospital sooner. The fact was, none of our kids were ever on time, and Tricia was pretty sure there was no hurry, and what good was spending extra time in the hospital, and so we waited. Thank God we didn’t wait too long, that time hadn’t run out.

Peter wrote to Christians asking how much longer:

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Make the most of this Advent season. Prepare, as purple represents, by examining yourselves and repenting of your sin. Strive to live as children of God, eagerly awaiting their Savior. Hope, as blue represents. Hope for Christ’s coming. ***“The days are coming.”*** Remember who said it. Not some coach whose squad disappointed us yet another time, but God—God who kept His promise that Christ would come at Christmas, and God who will keep His promise that Christ will come again. Amen.