

Sunday, December 2, 2018

Jeremiah 33 :14-16

I Thessalonians 3:9-13

Luke 21:25-36

A Righteous Branch as a Promise of Hope

How many of you know your family history? For many people living in Canada, immigration took place at some point in history by your ancestors because they left their homeland with the hope of a better life, with opportunities to settle on government land and to live in freedom. When we think about the generations who have lived before us we might be able to trace the voyages from the Old World to the New in the 1800's through the 1900's. Others involved moving to Canada as war brides post 1945 and still others are people who have been welcomed into this country within the last 10 to even 5 years. And still we welcome people into this country depending upon what they are experiencing where they live. Due to political unrest, wars, or internal conflicts, people have been moving around the world in search of the basic necessities of life- food, shelter and clothing and to have hope as they seek pursue their dreams for happiness. What is your family history? When and why did your ancestors come to Canada?

This ancestry search has now become big business as there are companies who will take a DNA swab and from this determine your heritage or ethnic background and then search for your ancestors. This is so that you can do further genealogical research to find out from where your family came and why. But why has finding out about our ancestors so important? Because if we know from where we come, we might have a better pathway of where we might go in this life and why we are interested in what we do and say.

Jeremiah was not telling his listeners about past generations and their faith journeys, but was sharing with them a prophecy which God would fulfill. Jeremiah states, "The days are coming when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. " This promise is that a descendant of David's family tree, a righteous Branch, will sprout and grow and he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days to come Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This person will be called the Lord our Righteousness.

His prophecies spoke of the descendants of David who would always be seated on the throne of the house of Israel and the priests who will have their offspring serving God through burnt offerings and presenting sacrifices. Jeremiah's prophecies describe then the relationship that those who rule on the throne will also be connected to those who serve in the synagogue.

This Righteous branch would save the people from their sins. Jeremiah is prophesying the role of the one who is to come. Jeremiah is telling the people that God's faithful people will be ruling the land and will be serving Him in the temples and synagogues for generations to come. He is also stating that this Righteous Branch is the one in the family tree of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who will change the world. How do we know if this prophesy is fulfilled? We can turn to Matthew 1:1-17 and read the names of the 42 generations of people who lived leading to Jesus. 14 from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile and 14 from the exile to Jesus.

So as we begin Advent we know that the One who is to come is the Righteous Branch of the line of David, Jesus. Even though Jesus was born in a stable long ago we will prepare and anticipate his coming into our world again, mainly because the world needs his message of hope. We need to have hope. Hope that is unshakable—unlike the earth which may move and cause fear to arise and damages that inconvenience many, the hope we yearn for is everlasting.

Hope seems to be lost in our secular world. People are dying for lack of hope. And because there seems to be little of it, there is high demand. But the problem is that they are searching for it in things which do not last. There are also people who believe that this world is as good as it gets but we must all face reality- it is not that good. But if you believe in the promises and prophecies of God being fulfilled and still coming true today, we know that there is hope beyond the manger, beyond the empty tomb and this hope is found in Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not need to know where he came from or his family tree figured out. He knew his purpose when he came to earth and this was to save the people of God from their sins and to give hope. But what about you? Do you know if the path you are walking on is with Jesus? How are we recognizing what we are doing is correct in God's eyes? One way of knowing this is simply asking yourself are you faithful in what you say and do as you reach out to others? Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica to encourage the faithful to remain faithful even when they are discouraged. We all struggle with life at different times but it is often our faith that will get us through even the most challenging moments. But where is your faith found? And where is your hope?

Jesus was teaching his disciples about events and situations which would come. He talked about the signs in the sun, moon, stars; he talked about countries in anguish, the waters tossing about, and he talked about people who would be afraid of what they see. But Jesus tries to calm his listeners and says when these things begin, not if, but when—stand up, lift up your heads because your redemption is drawing near. It will seem that hell has broken loose but don't be afraid= rely on your faith in God, and

in Jesus your Saviour. Don't be afraid—help is on the way. For when you see these things happen, God's kingdom is near.

People have been saying the end of the world is coming soon—global warming, mass migration patterns of animals and peoples, world leaders gathering and see different friendships emerging, earthquakes, tsunamis, fires and snowfalls, and just chaotic events occurring. But Jesus spoke about these things- and says don't be afraid if something occurs, remember Jeremiah's prophesy of the righteous branch because the Son of Man, Jesus will come to save his people. This prophecy is still being fulfilled because Jesus is still saving people from their sins and preparing them for their eternal life. But we must have hope. And to grow in our hopefulness, we need to pray constantly that we will have the strength and sense about us to make it through everything that's coming and end up stronger than ever!

By faith we believe God's Spirit is present with us now. By faith we believe that Jesus was born, grew up, taught and lived and died and rose again. Yet as we begin Advent we need to prepare our hearts again to receive this Righteous Branch and Son of God.

As we begin Advent, author Doug Mendenhall shares this story about what preparing for Jesus might mean for us today.

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and wondered if he could spend a day or two with us. I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you be here?" I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's family members and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa. That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the highway. We had 8 minutes to prepare.

He got off the phone and told his family members what was happening. His wife ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way to get results. My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were slobs and unbelievers.

The TV was turned off in one room; and then the laptop was turned off in another. Not to mention the desktop which had a video game going was also turned off. He sure did not want to explain some of the choices the family watched for programming. 6 minutes

Coffee tables were cleaned up and sorted leaving good Christian magazines like Mandate, or Faith Today or the Observer face up—the Bible was placed in a prominent position as well. A very good impression! Five minutes to go.

Good thing the grass was cut due to long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway? The mail was brought in, sorting out the junk and the bills were put away neatly on the desk. Shoes and boots were straightened by the back door and coats were hung up in the closet and out of sight. The cat's litter box was cleaned and of course so was the bathroom. The teakettle was plugged in, cookies were put on a plate. Two minutes to go.

The pillows were plumped up, dirty dishes went into the dishwasher, kids were told to behave and the cat was put downstairs. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job. Then the doorbell rang.

As we begin Advent you have 4 weeks to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. What are your priorities? What do you want to do as you prepare? What is it that is most important?

Your heart-are you willing to receive the spiritual moments of new ideas/ thoughts/ and life? Are you willing to cast away your fears and fully put your trust in Jesus? Are you willing to give thanks to God for the righteous branch – Jesus to come to you in hope?

Are you searching for this hope and will this make a difference for you this Advent and Christmas? Jeremiah's prophesy is not new—it's a part of the old story leading towards Jesus birth. Are you willing to experience the hope found in Christ Jesus? Then we need to pray and seek God's blessings as we search for Christ, as we seek to grow in faith and as we share with others the new joy we will experience because of Jesus' birth! Let us remember this as we pray>

God of hope we praise you for Jesus and his coming to us again in this Advent Christmas seasons. Enable us to look to you with hope in our hearts that Jesus the Righteous one who came to save us will come to us again. Calm our hearts as we pray to you. Amen.