

“A Righteous Branch: Jeremiah’s Hope”

December 5, 2021
York United Ministries
Worship Service at King City United Church
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

O God, how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word
is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to
observe your righteous ordinances. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading

Jeremiah 33:14-16

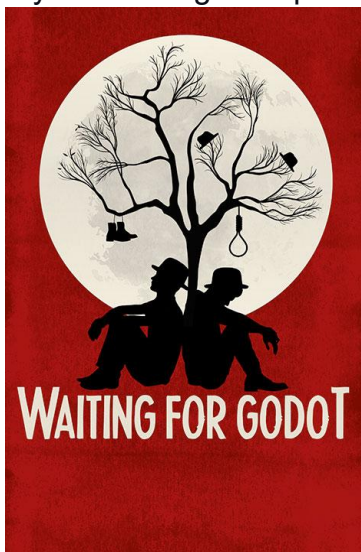
¹⁴ The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to
the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will
cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and
righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will
live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our
righteousness.”

This is the living Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

<Children's Time>

Do you have any experience of waiting for someone? How about Christmas? Are you anxiously waiting for Christmas? I'd like to share a story of Godot: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. There are two characters in the book; Vladimir and Estragon. They are waiting for a person known as Godot. They don't know who the person is and



why they need to meet him, but they are convinced that life is endless waiting for Godot. And the book ends without any conclusion but waiting for Godot. Because of the confusing and weird storytelling, the readers assume that Godot is god, hope, future, freedom or even death. Among this confusion, one thing was clear: Whatever he is, Godot didn't come to them. Samuel Beckett paradoxically makes a travesty of our irrational or meaningless reality. We Christians also have a story of waiting for someone, particularly in December.

Who are you waiting for in December? Yes, Jesus Christ. The Messiah we have waited for has come to the world, and we greet, praise, and worship the baby in the Christmas season. It is good to know that Christmas is the combination word of Christ and mass, meaning worship. Vladimir and Estragon are just waiting for Godot, but the Israelites met the Messiah 2000 years ago. And the Messiah has become the hope of life for all. Therefore, the reality that we live in is not an irrational and meaningless endeavor but a meaningful and purposeful abundance. The Christ has come, so we can wait for Jesus with joy and gratitude. I hope that you are waiting for baby Jesus, rather than Santa Clause or Christmas presents. And that you are filled with the hope, joy, peace, and the love that Jesus Christ offers. I bless you, my friends.

<Reflection>

The season of Advent has come, the second Sunday of the Christian calendar. What a most wonderful time and a great season of the year! Even a TV commercial sings this too: "It's the most wonderful time of the year!" It surely is. In this great season,

we are joyful not because we are giving and receiving presents but because we celebrate God's presence throughout the previous year and blissfully expect divine guidance in the year to come. We look back on our past with gratitude and look forward to our future with hope. We are in the time of "in-between," which brings a mixed feeling of gratitude, regrets, hope, and fear. We Christians are waiting for and looking for the baby Jesus who was born and still is being born. And we praise Emmanuel, God-with-us, who has come and is coming.

The Bible passage today, taken from Jeremiah, also praises the Emmanuel who is to come. The words of Jeremiah usually include the word of the final judgment; however, the chapters from 30 to 33, which are well-known as "the Chapters of Consolation," prophetically foretell and proclaim the ultimate hope, the coming of the Messiah. I gently encourage you to read these chapters at home during this week and reflect on them.

Focusing on the passage today, I'd like to walk you through two things: First, the context of the writing and second, the commonality and genealogy of righteousness. What is the context of Jeremiah's proclamation? As I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, the contents of his proclamation are about consolation and triumphant hope. The origin of the victorious hope is the Messiah, our redeemer. Jeremiah 33:15, we read today, says: "I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land."¹ Again, "he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." Conversely speaking, it is the counter-proof that justice and righteousness are not found in the land. We can grasp the understanding when we know the context of his proclamation. Jeremiah is speaking to the elders, religious leaders, and elites who were captured and exiled by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire.² After the complete destruction of Jerusalem in BCE 587, all the

¹ Jeremiah 33:15.

² "These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." (Jeremiah 29:1)

leaders and smart people were forced to move from Jerusalem to Babylon and become slaves. Fear, anger, and trauma had swept the land of Israel, and amid the frustration, Jeremiah proclaims justice and righteousness in the land.

Although it was the most vulnerable time, Jeremiah sees the hope to come, the recovery of Jerusalem by the Messiah, a righteous Branch from King David. His proclamation is not just praise for one person, King David, but rather the recovery of national glory, communal justice, and righteousness. Jeremiah accentuates the succession of Kingship to the Messiah, and the Messiah serves not his self-righteousness but the righteousness for others. It is also confirmed in the last verse that we read. It says "The LORD is **our** righteousness."³ What is "our" righteousness? What is antonym of "our" righteousness? I guess it is self-righteousness because self-righteousness is all about self-satisfactory self-approval. However, "our" righteousness that Jeremiah accentuates is the justice of serving others with voluntary, humble giving. And he visions a provocative new way of healing and recovery of the world to come.

Sisters and brothers, the world we live in are highly complicated; floods in the East and West coast, the droughts and fires in the summertime, the elevation of the sea level, the spread and impact of the COVID 19, and the inflation of the economy. So many things happened altogether. We humans are so vulnerable, and we've never experienced total vulnerability. In the midst of the hardships, the Advent season unfailingly engages our context and situations. We want solutions; we need breakthroughs; we need the ultimate hope. Yes, it is a wonderful time of the year; it is the perfect time of the year to long for the baby Jesus, our Messiah. As Jeremiah inspires his people with God's promises and love, making the best of the worst situation of slavery, we want to envision the coming of the Lord and the victory of the Messiah with the righteousness, justice, recovery, and healing for all who are in vulnerability.

³ Jeremiah 33:16.

Therefore, brothers and sisters! Let's stand firm, support each other. Even in times of adversity, we are writing Christian history as passed the most challenging time in human history. Nevertheless, we must live out our life because the baby Jesus is coming throughout our generations and generations. And our struggle cannot be defeated because God is with us. O, come, o come Emmanuel! Let us pray silently, pondering the Word of God today.