

Sermon    December 1, 2024

Jeremiah 33:14–16

**Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!**

Welcome to the Church season of Advent! Advent means arrival or appearing. It's like Epiphany, but with less of a royal tone. The four Sundays in Advent bring us prophecies from the Old Testament prophets Jeremiah, Malachi, Zephaniah, and Micah. We all know people who have named one or more of their boys after these names. And for good reason! These four prophets bring us promises of what the Lord will fulfill for us in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The four promises given us in Advent are 1) In Christ, we will have a right relationship with our Father; 2) Evil will be judged and condemned; 3) We will be elevated to places of honor as God's people; and 4) We will enjoy peace and safety forever with Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Sound nice? Well let's get to it.

Today's lesson is from Jeremiah chapter 33. This is one of my all-time personal favorites.

*In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."* Jeremiah 33:16

The key to applying this Word of the prophets to our lives is to understand what is meant here by *righteousness*. This is a word we often find in the pages of Scripture. We throw that word around a lot in church life. But what does it mean? God is righteous. Jesus is righteous, for sure. How can Jesus be our righteousness?

In this prophecy from Jeremiah, righteousness means to have a right relationship. Specifically, to have a right relationship with God. Truly, to have a right relationship with God would be the best foundation for the rest of our lives that we could imagine. No matter what is going on in our life, whether up or down, being right with God makes everything that much better. That's why what Jeremiah says here is so important. It's fundamental, foundational, formative for our lives of faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me give you an example of how this kind of righteousness works. Or, in this case, doesn't work. According to multiple news reports, Ellen DeGeneres and her close friend of many years have left the United States for good. They have taken up permanent residence in England. Ms. DeGeneres has bought and sold a number of houses over the years, so moving once again is nothing out of the ordinary. However, this time she says she's left the good ol' USA for good. Why? The election, of course. I guess she didn't like the way it turned out. For all the beauty, history, good-hearted and hard-working people, and rare freedoms compared to the rest of the world, Donald Trump winning the presidential election was a dealbreaker. Ms. DeGeneres - who herself, according to her own admission, was kicked out of show business because of the toxic work environment she created on her show, now will not stand for another show biz personality from *The Apprentice* fame taking the top office in the land. I guess she was kicked out of show business and now has kicked herself out of the country.

The point and connection to today's sermon is simple. Ms. DeGeneres doesn't have a right relationship with either the show business industry OR the USA. Her inability or unwillingness to right the wrongs of her business practices and burn that bridge broke her relationship with show business. Then, she let her hardline political views get in the way of her love of our beautiful country and has again exiled herself from

this great land of freedom. She has even gone on record saying we will never see her again in the US of A. HMMPH!

This illustrates the polar opposite of what it means to have a right relationship – what Jesus has come to accomplish in our lives. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and that is no small matter. In Jesus, we have peace with God, which gives us a right relationship with him. Then, day by day, more and more, we have peace and right relationships with each other as time goes by, and as the peace we have with God seeps into our daily lives lived in community with other people and we are more and more inclined to live in patience and kindness with others.

Jesus is the only name given under heaven by which can have a right relationship with God. Unlike Ms. DeGeneres, we can't just leave the business or the country to escape the expectations and justice of God. For us, there's nowhere to run. Except to the feet of our crucified, risen, and reigning Lord Jesus. Our hearts have a permanent home in him.

Last Thursday was a day set aside by our nation to give thanks to God for another year of blessings. I'm not sure how many people actually gave thanks to God. A large number, I'm sure. For many others it was mostly about having a few days off work, enjoying their family's traditional recipes together, football, and shopping. With so many people not believing in God anymore despite the clear evidence of his existence and nature, it's baffling. Others choose to bury their heads in the sand and ignore the issue of the existence of God and their accountability to him. They get on with the busyness of life and build their world about paychecks, comfortable houses, and personal fulfillment. Once again this year, receiving a right relationship with God in Jesus Christ isn't on their Christmas list.

Living in such a culture, we can get drawn into the same worldly mindset and outlook. As God's people, we live by faith. Our lives started with faith, they continue in faith, and end in faith. That faith is not in ourselves, our pious ideas about God, the kind deeds we do for others, or that we remembered to give thanks to God at Thanksgiving. Our faith is from God and directed towards God. We come to God with nothing of our own but our desperate need, and he fills us with his love and grace and gives us a permanent place in his family.

As Jeremiah says, the Lord is our righteousness. Baptized into Jesus, he has given us a right relationship with God who we can now call our Father. Jesus says he is coming soon. Because we are saved in Christ, we can look forward to his return anticipating the end of unrighteousness and an eternity in the goodness of God.

We pray the Lord keep us in true faith in Christ! Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.**

Pastor Ron Breight                      Christ Lutheran Church   Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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