

## The Lord is Our Righteousness©

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36    December 2, 2012    Reverend Sharlyn Gates

### ADVENT 1

Oh boy. Here we are finally in Advent. It's the first Sunday and we've barely gotten started, although most likely you have a tree up and decorated and have probably already started some Christmas shopping.

You may already feel the hectic swirl of time in this busy season. You may have come this morning hoping for a word of calm and peace and encouragement to go back out and face your busy life with.

So, most likely, you were not expecting to hear a passage like this one from Luke today. Believe me, you are not the only one here who would prefer a sweet story about a precious baby who came to save the world from itself.

I can't speak for everyone here, but as the preacher this morning, these kinds of passages make me want to consider being something else in life – a waitress or a coal miner or a brain surgeon or a ditch digger. Because preaching these Scriptures are, I believe, really serious business and really important for Christians to hear and know about. I take this job quite seriously.

David Lose – a Bible commentator from Working Preacher – calls these apocalyptic passages “fantasy.” They are, he says, fantastic, yet true.

They are “beyond our experience” but true; they are doubtful, yet true; incredible but true.

“This week's passage,” He says, “is peculiar and hard and odd and wonderful because it announces to us a promise that itself is peculiar and hard and odd and wonderful, a promise, that is, that is big enough to save us.”

I think the hesitation by preachers like me is that there is so much emphasis on the end times out there – movies, preachers who take everything literally, we combine the truths of the Scriptures with our own imagination and interpretation and we get books like the “Left Behind” series and movies that tell of airplanes crashing because the pilot was raptured, we get sci fi horror movies that confuse us and cause us to think it might be true.

The truth is, we have to read the Bible with our eyes open to lots of other things that were happening at the time. This passage in Luke is known as the “Little Apocalypse.” That is, a little “revelation.”

It is a vision of something that is to come; it is seeing something that is hidden. Apocalyptic literature is a disclosure or revelation about the supernatural world beyond the world of historical events. The last book of the Bible – The book titled Revelation is also the Apocalypse.

And the focus of apocalyptic writing is on eschatology, that is, the end of the world as we now experience it and the beginning of a new world.

It might be helpful to know that Luke is writing this gospel with the gospel of Mark open as reference with the Old Testament prophets influencing him as well ... Prophets like Daniel, who used a lot of symbolism in his prophecies – who told of the Son of Man coming and redeeming; and Isaiah and other prophets who told of tumultuous times; and of a Messiah, a suffering servant, who would come to save God's people.

It might also be useful in this interpretation to know that when Luke wrote this gospel, Jerusalem had been destroyed about 15 or 20 years earlier. The people had gone through much of this chaos and turmoil already. Surely they were wondering if there would ever be an end to their suffering.

As in book of Revelation, Luke is speaking to believers whose world has been turned upside down with war, persecution, hideous infliction of pain and suffering. One might read these passages with fear and trepidation because they do sound very frightening.

But for God's faithful, they are promises of hope. They are words of encouragement and strong assurance that in spite of the world gone mad, there is a Redeemer who will have the last word. There is a Savior who will rescue us from these fearful times. There will come an end to these times and a beginning of God's time.

In every age there have been the signs of what we hear Jesus saying to look for. In our own generation we have seen destruction with Tsunami's, earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, tornadoes.

We have heard prophets saying the time is now, predicting the date for the end of the world, even though Jesus warns us not to do that!

We have heard the false prophets. We have known and experienced wars and hunger and suffering and death and tears and pain.

Jesus says "when these things begin to take place, take heart, people! Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

We, who are the faithful believers are being encouraged to not lose courage but to stand up, lift up our heads and watch for Him; to never give up, to constantly live our lives as if our time is now.

We are all coming to the end – we just don't know when. So be ready, Jesus says. Live faithfully, obedient to the Word of God because God's word will stand. Jesus says "heaven and earth will pass away, but God's word will remain forever."

So, as you come to this first Sunday of Advent, weary already from the hectic life of the culture we live in, not to mention the grief we experience as we remember the loved one who is gone, as we fight down the fear because of an illness we, or a loved one, is battling; as we work through the grief and anger and confusion of divorce; as we hear frightening things on the news about our world, about weather changes, about war and crime, not to mention the fiscal cliff ...

Take this word as the comfort and strength and encouragement you are longing for. It is an age-old promise by the one who did come as that tiny, sweet babe in a manger, that Christ-Child whom we know as Immanuel (God with us).

"Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus said to his disciples. Do not be afraid. Stand up, look up! Lift up your heads and watch for your Redeemer. He has not forgotten you. He has grown up from that baby. He is on watch himself. He is Lord of all.

As Jeremiah promised the Israelites in their day of deep distress; The Lord is our Righteousness. The Hebrew word for righteousness is *tseh'-dek*, it means integrity, justice, upright.

This is a fantastic, doubtful, amazing, incredible, impossible word to believe – yet believe it because, however it happens, whenever it happens, it is God's promise to us. We have a Savior who will come again.

Things might get really bad, but nothing, not even death can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ who is our Righteousness.

We sure can't do these things ourselves. We cannot save ourselves from sin and death. That's why we rejoice in this wonderful, fantastic, amazing word of God. It takes a Redeemer who is God to do this work.

Advent is a time for waiting and preparing. We prepare for the coming of the Christ-child, for he is always reentering our hearts and our world. We wait and prepare with joy for the celebration of his birth.

But Advent is also about that **in between time** – the time we live in now as we wait for God's time to be finally established – the time when justice and peace will prevail, when there will be no more tears and sorrow and sickness.

Advent is a time of waiting on God; a time to experience our longing for God, our need for a Redeemer.

May we be watchful in this Advent season – may we truly experience waiting on God as pure, sheer longing for the Lord, who is our Righteousness. Lift up your heads, for your redemption is near!

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