

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
Advent Midweek 1 – December 1, 2021
Jeremiah 23:5-8 – Jesus is Our Righteous Branch
By Vicar Peter Wagner

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Hear again from the Old Testament reading for the first Sunday in Advent, from Jeremiah chapter 23. **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’”** This is our text.

This prophecy from Jeremiah very clearly proclaims the coming Messiah, the Christ. It proclaims that when the Messiah comes, he will reign as heir to David’s throne. He will be the king of righteousness; he will bring salvation to Israel. And his righteousness will be imputed to the people, he will make them righteous by his presence.

The book of Jeremiah is a very sad book, filled with prophecy of woe and judgment against unfaithful Judah. It foretells deportation to Babylon, and utter destruction of Jerusalem. But it also contains these wonderful promises of comfort and restoration by the gospel. In fact, today’s gospel promises are so important that they appear in Jeremiah not only here in chapter 23, but again almost verbatim in chapter 33, repeating that in the coming days of the righteous Branch, the Lord will be our righteousness.

In these promises, Jeremiah compares the salvation of God’s people by the righteous Branch to the ancient Exodus out of Egypt under Moses. The salvation of Jesus will far exceed that of Moses, when God brought his people out of Egypt by a strong hand and a mighty arm. Jeremiah writes in our text, **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’”**

By this, Jeremiah means that the coming day will be a great day of rejoicing, the new Exodus. Our king will lead us out of this world of sin, slavery and death, this Egypt, into the heavenly land, the new Jerusalem. Our salvation under the new Moses, under Jesus, will be so great that God’s people will not even mention the ancient Exodus or commemorate the ancient Passover any longer. No longer will they say, **“As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,”** because there will be a new Passover feast celebrating the new Exodus. They will celebrate the righteous Branch who gathered the remnant of his people out of the nations into his eternal kingdom. There we shall dwell securely. We shall sit down to feast in the presence of Christ our Passover Lamb, drinking the wine of salvation at the banquet table of his marriage feast.

Jeremiah is not the only Old Testament prophet who speaks of the Messiah as our righteous Branch. When Jeremiah described the Messiah in these terms, he was pointing directly back to the prophet Isaiah, who wrote about a hundred years earlier. Isaiah 11, **“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”**¹

By pointing back to Isaiah, Jeremiah confirmed Isaiah’s prophetic word, that the dead stump of David’s throne would again sprout forth a new branch of life. He also confirmed, as Isaiah foretold, that the Messiah born of a virgin would suffer as our servant to bear our iniquity. **“By his stripes we are healed.”**²

But there’s more. In the book of Zechariah, written a hundred years after Jeremiah and two hundred years after Isaiah, we find still more prophecies about the righteous Branch. The first time Zechariah mentions the Branch is in chapter three. Zechariah sees a vision of an ordinary man, named Joshua, who served as high priest in Jerusalem in Zechariah’s day. This high priest is standing before the angel of the Lord, clothed in filthy garments, being accused by Satan. But God rebukes Satan and commands that Joshua’s filthy garments be removed, saying, **“Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.”**³ Then a clean turban is placed on Joshua’s head and he receives clean garments. And the Lord says

¹ Isaiah 11:1-2

² Isaiah 53:5

³ Zechariah 3:4

to him, **“Hear now, O Joshua the high priest... behold, I will bring my servant the Branch... and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree.”**⁴

The second time Zechariah mentions the Branch is in chapter six. This time the same high priest Joshua is being crowned with a crown of silver and gold, in the presence of the exiles who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. At his coronation, Zechariah prophecies about Joshua, **“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’”**⁵

The Hebrew name Joshua means “The Lord is salvation.” That’s the same name as Jesus, Yeshua. The Lord our righteousness is our salvation. In Zechariah, Joshua the high priest prefigured Jesus our great high priest. The new Joshua offered himself for our salvation, he now reigns eternally on his heavenly throne. He is the root that comes from the stump of Jesse to renew us and establish peace for us forever. He is our righteous Branch. When Jesus said, **“I am the vine and you are the branches,”**⁶ he meant that in him alone, joined to our righteous Branch through baptism, we abide and bear fruit of faith.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord.” The day of the Branch is coming. The salvation of Israel is coming. The deliverance of God’s people from all guilt, from all sin, from all accusations of Satan – he is coming. He is the Lord. He is our righteousness. In him all the Gentiles, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. **“To us a child is born, to us a son is given... his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”**⁷

He is coming as a baby in a manger, he is coming as our king. Righteous and having salvation is he, but humble and riding on a donkey, coming to die for you. He is coming to remove the iniquity of the whole world in a single day, the day of his crucifixion. By his suffering for you, he took your guilt away. He has removed your filthy garments. He has clothed you with eternal salvation, the white robes of baptism.

Now he comes as the risen Christ, comes to you through word and sacrament, the means of grace. And at the last day he will come again with the clouds of heaven, to reign as your king, to deal wisely, to judge the earth and execute righteousness and justice for the oppressed. He is coming to gather his children, all Christians called by his name, to gather them from the ends of the earth, to save them from all their enemies, to bring them in peace and joy into the heavenly city, to crown them with glory and honor forever.

Isaiah 4, **“In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.”**⁸ Isaiah 60, **“Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified.”**⁹ No wonder they waved palm branches to welcome the righteous Branch. **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”**¹⁰ Amen.

⁴ Zechariah 3:8-10

⁵ Zechariah 6:12-13

⁶ John 15:5

⁷ Isaiah 9:6

⁸ Isaiah 4:2

⁹ Isaiah 60:21

¹⁰ Matthew 21:9