

New Church Year November 28, 2021

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Pastor David Labuhn

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, today is the beginning of a new church year. Happy New Church Year. Our liturgical year cycle ended last week on the last Sunday after the Pentecost with our celebration of Christ the King (and His second coming in Glory). Today, we start the cycle again, on this first Sunday in Advent, as we remember our need for a Savior and prepare to celebrate His first coming as Jesus. In between those two events, year after year, we retrace the life of Christ, over and over again. From Advent to Christmas and Epiphany, to Lent and Easter, and Ascension and Pentecost, following the Biblical account of the **why**, the **who**, and the **how** of our Salvation in the life-saving work of Jesus.

The beginning of every new year always carries with it a bit of anxiety and concern whether it is our new church year or the temporal new year that starts on January 1st. What will this new year bring? What good things and what not so good things will come in this new year? The anticipation of those events is stressful to us. As people of God, we have anxiety and concerns about our church in this era of un-godliness in which, as Pastor Schaeffer said last week, only 20% of people attend church in our culture. This should give us pause, as we consider how God will respond to this abandonment of Him and the reliance on other gods such as power and money and fame and comfort and leisure and even, acts of evil in our world. How WILL God respond – or maybe He is already responding.

And what about us? How are we to respond in this very secular world as faithful, disciples of Christ? DO we speak up and speak out? How will we be received when we do so? What will be the response from the non-Godly people around us? The response of God and our responses to this secular world all contribute to the tension and anxiety in our lives in these times as we start another cycle of the liturgical year. A new year in which we follow the account of the birth, teaching, miracles, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming of Jesus once again. The path of our salvation and its result for our spiritual lives with our Savior.

A nurse was standing at her station in a hospital when suddenly a man came running down the corridor. The nurse stopped the man and said, *“Sir, what’s the matter?”* The man stopped, paused, and blurted out, *“I just heard my nurse say, ‘don’t worry, it’s a simple operation, I’m sure it will be alright.’”* Hearing these words, the nurse looked at him with compassion and said, *“I am sure your nurse was just trying to comfort and reassure you. What is so frightening about that?”* The man looked at her with astonishment and blurted out, *“She wasn’t talking to me. She was talking to my surgeon.”*

Anxiety and fear. Worry and uneasiness. These feelings are a part of our lives. I am sure that each of you, and me, have had those moments. Times, when you were all, shook up. Times before operations and medical procedures. Times when a doctor or dentist was about to tell you the diagnosis. Times when you were about to make a big decision. Times when a spouse or friend or neighbor was in jeopardy. All these create anxiety and stress. We are not alone. The prophet Jeremiah from our Old Testament reading today would understand us and these feelings. He was experiencing them too.

God had called him as a young man, probably in his late teens, to be His prophet. His response to God was, ***“I do not know***

how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But God did not accept his response. God had chosen him to speak to the people of God, on His behalf. God said in part, ***“...you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you....”***

Jeremiah obeyed God and spoke the words that God told him to speak. They were harsh and condemning words because the people of God had turned away from Him and had turned to pagan gods especially the Canaanite god, Baal. They were committing sinful acts. Jeremiah spoke out about this ungodly behavior and called the people to repentance. The response from the people of that time was a refusal to listen and rejection of the speaker, Jeremiah. The response of the people to the Word of God, through His prophet Jeremiah, was met with physical attacks, slander, imprisonment, and two attempts on the life of Jeremiah. He was always ignored. His every prophetic utterance was contradicted by the priests and a group of false prophets. After several years of preaching, Jeremiah’s family turned against him. God had called Jeremiah and, in obedience, Jeremiah had spoken for God. Yet, Jeremiah was seen as a demoralizing naysayer, a doom-and-gloom prophet. The message sent through him resulted in violence and great anguish for Jeremiah. He shared his anguish and frustration with God in this prayer:

“O, Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, ‘Violence and destruction!’ For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in.” (Jer. 20:7–9)

We hear the distress and frustration; discouragement and exasperation in these words of Jeremiah. What inner turmoil in his heart and soul as he served God among these unfaithful people of God. Can you relate to these feelings of Jeremiah as you reflect on your own lives? Anxiety, stress, even irritation, and anger toward God swirling inside yourself, just like Jeremiah. But that wasn't all that faced Jeremiah (and the people of God). Their external world was about to collapse. Precise dating is given in Chapter 32:1: ***"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the 10th year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the 18th year of Nebuchadnezzar."*** This date is significant because it is the year 587 BC, just one year before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The external threat to Jerusalem, which God was allowing to occur, came in the form of an attack by one of the two most powerful military forces of the day, Babylon. The Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, were about to conquer Jerusalem, enslave its population, order the sons and friends of the king, Zedekiah, killed as he was forced to look on. After this, they put out the eyes of Zedekiah, bound him, and took him in humiliation to Babylon.

And these things happened to Jerusalem, Judah, and King Zedekiah, just as Jeremiah had foretold. During the time before all of these events, Jeremiah was at a crossroads personally and his nation was at a crossroads as well with formidable forces closing it and its people including Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, a young man, was the one God had called to announce that this would all happen because the people had so completely rejected God. The God who had given them the bounteous land, the glorious temple, and powerful, fortress City of Jerusalem. With his own inner turmoil, Jeremiah was made aware of the impending doom that was to come as described to him by God. Despite his best efforts, he was

unable to move the King, the priests, or the people to repentance and a return to God. They scoffed at him and derided him.

Yet, even with his personal and his national security and safety at risk, Jeremiah did not stop speaking the word of God. In addition to the warnings of the foreboding gloom and destruction, Jeremiah also spoke the words we heard today. ***“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. 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’”***

God now gave healing and calming words. They were words of redemption and restoration. Jeremiah was describing the coming of Jesus and the grace and forgiveness of God for His people and us. He was describing a restoration of the city and nation, but more importantly the restoration of a relationship with God. The bad times were still going to come. God’s wrath had to be vindicated. Jerusalem would be destroyed, the Temple would be burned and razed, and the people would be taken in slavery to Babylon. But God, who is merciful and just, would restore His faithful and repentant people to Him. And this great reversal of the course of events for God’s people of the Old Testament would be through a branch of the Davidic line. This would all happen because of the sin of the people the mercy of God through a just and righteous king. A new king who would bring security to the land and restore it to greatness. With all that Jeremiah and the people were facing, God was sending a message of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. A message of hope in the prophecy about this king. And this king would be called ***“the Lord is our righteousness.”*** He would be our King, as well, just as we acknowledged last week - Jesus, our King.

It is 2021. All of us struggle with our own personal insecurity and stress. We worry about our health in this time of a pandemic; we are stressed about our finances in this time of inflation. We are unsure about the future for our children in light of the signs and forebodings of global warning. We see the culture around us turning further and further away from God. We are threatened and abused for speaking out about the sinful actions of those around us and we are ridiculed as “Bible beaters” and “Jesus freaks” “old fogies” and not being “politically correct.” Added to these stresses, are the stresses within us, because of our own sins, which make us more like the world around us rather than what God expects and demands of us. We are torn inwardly like Jeremiah.

And, from the outside, the threats abound as well. On Friday, we heard of a new mutation of the deadly COVID-19 virus called Omicron that has emerged in South Africa. And despite efforts to isolate it, it has already marched into Belgium, Hong Kong, Germany, Israel, and the Netherlands. Our terrestrial enemies, Iran, China, and North Korea are developing weapons of mass destruction and the means to send them against us. Other terrestrial enemies, the Russians, and their allies are working hard to attack us with cyber warfare to disrupt our communications, utilities, businesses, and health care systems. Our spiritual enemies, the devil, and his minions have invaded the hearts of many in this county and the results are an increase in violence, murders, thefts, kidnappings, and other sinful acts. Like, Jeremiah, we are beset with stress and anxiety from within and without.

But did you hear the words of Jeremiah to God’s people of his time? Jeremiah said to the people of Jerusalem, in the desperate situations, in which they found themselves: ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 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. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely.”

Jeremiah described another great reversal that would come about because of the presence of the One who would bring justice and righteousness. David’s seed, Jesus, fulfills the wonderful words precisely as Jeremiah promised. And God fulfilled His promise to His ancient people found in Scripture. God fulfilled His promise, because He sent His Son, Jesus, the righteous One, to die for all their sins and our sins. He sends Jesus to right the wrongs that His ancient people and all of us have done to God and are doing to God. He placated the wrath of God taking it upon Himself for our sake. He restored the relationship between us and God.

God, through Jesus, brought security and stability to His people of Israel as foretold by Jeremiah. God, through Jesus, brings us that same profound and permanent security and stability. As we struggle with the stress and strains of our lives, whether brought on by our actions or the actions of those around us and as we are threatened by our enemies in this terrestrial life – the world, the devil, and sin, we have a promise from God. God, through Jesus, has provided us with the hope of a better and more secure life. A life with Him. We are assured that we have been saved by the righteousness of Jesus and by the grace of God. And, we are in Him, not by our own effort, not by our own achievement, not by something we have done or not done. We are in him—in David’s Seed—because we have been joined to His death and to His resurrection in our Baptism. His death has done away with Israel’s sin, Judah’s sin, our sin. His resurrection has given us life that is in God—in the Father, in the Son, in the Holy Spirit—the triune name that was spoken over us as the water was poured on us. Now, not even the anxiety of death can conquer us, for our life is secure in our life with God. We have been saved and we only await the arrival of the righteous

One, who has saved us, to take us home to heaven with Him. The promises of God were true that Jeremiah gave to the ancient people of God. We have the record of God's Word as witnesses to that.

The Word of Jesus is true and certain too. Words He spoke to grieving Martha: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"*** (Jn 11:25). And our answer, with Martha and with Jeremiah, and with all who believe is ***"Yes, Lord; I believe"*** (11:27).

So we are beginning a new church year. We, faithful believers, do so in hope and security and peace, as we retrace the steps in the story of our salvation and the fulfillment of the promises of God through Jesus Christ, giving Him thanks and praise for His Son, Jesus, the righteous One. Amen.