

November 30, 2003
Advent 1

"Secure in Our Alien Righteousness"

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

When I was a child we had two plum trees near our house. The trees produced dark blue plums that ripened in early fall. All summer we watched the green plums getting larger and larger. Then they turned dark blue and sweet and juicy. The best part was biting into the plum and having the juice run down the sides of your mouth.

One of the trees died. Shortly after that the other tree, laden with green plums, was broken off close to the ground by a powerful summer thunderstorm. My mother said somewhat sadly, "That's it, no more plums."

Then something strange happened. From the broken off stump of the tree, from the original rootstock on which the blue plums had been grafted, a green shoot emerged. It grew quickly and within several years was producing new plums. They were reddish in color and even sweeter and tastier than the blue plums that were on the tree previously.

I mention this story, because I pray that it will help us see the picture before us in these amazing words from the prophet Jeremiah. The prophet pictures Jesus coming into the world as a sprout or shoot from the stump of David's royal family. This tender shoot produced a righteousness and perfection unlike anything the world has ever known. It is a righteousness that offers people the privilege of being accepted by God in this life and all eternity. It is what Martin Luther called an "alien righteousness." It is something totally outside of our existence, from a whole different world, a righteousness that God provides us in Jesus, that is pleasing, and tasty and delicious and acceptable to him. This morning we want to focus on these words and speak to you about the wonderful privilege of being **"Secure in Our Alien Righteousness."**

1) The Lord promised this alien righteousness

In the words just read to you, the Lord promised his Old Testament people that he would provide them with a righteousness they could never find in themselves. Listen to what the Lord says about keeping his promises. "The days are coming when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah." To read the Old Testament is to read the story of how God promised in many different ways to send a Savior who would provide people with what they lost in the Garden of Eden, righteousness or perfection. To Abraham the Lord promised to send a descendant who would bless the whole world. To Isaiah the Lord said, "My righteous servant will justify many." To Jeremiah the Lord

promises a righteous Branch who would produce the single perfect life no one else would ever be able to produce. God's plan was to have this perfect gift of righteousness serve the only pure source of eternal salvation for people who had no hope in themselves.

Talk about a hopeless group of people. Jeremiah spoke those words to the people of Jerusalem who were under siege by the Babylonians. Every day Jeremiah walked the streets and pleaded with people to give up the city and not be mercilessly slaughtered by the Babylonians when they breached the walls. The people did not want to hear God's Word from the mouth of Jeremiah. They did not want to be told they were sinning against God by worshipping Baal and other false gods, even sacrificing their children in the fire to the strange gods. Jeremiah shared this message with them from the Lord, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." These totally dysfunctional people were promised a Messiah, a righteous Branch, a Savior who could put them right with their God, and make them safe and secure in his loving arms. If only they would turn from the evil ways and trust in the promise of the Messiah. Then they could be restored and brought back to God and be safe in the palm of his hand. God's plan was to save them with an alien righteousness.

This past week I had to the opportunity to listen to a tape cassette of a message delivered several years ago by Charles Colson to a group of Christian prison workers who had gathered for a convention in Chicago. Colson told the story of being invited to visit one of the worst prisons in Brazil that had suddenly changed after it was taken over by two Christian missionaries. The prison had actually been turned over to be run by the prisoners, and it was proving to be a model prison. What was the secret? Colson was welcomed at the gate by a man who had been imprisoned for murder, and then given a tour of the facility. Every prison cell had Bible pictures and Bible passages. New prisoners were placed under the care of prisoners whose lives had been changed by God's word. The guide told Colson, do you want to see the punishment rooms? He proudly showed him the empty rooms and said there is only one prisoner still left, do you want to see him? Fearing nothing, Colson said yes. They entered the cell, and in the room they saw a cross carefully carved by the prisoners and on that cross was the twisted and tortured body of Jesus. The guide proudly pointed to Jesus and said here is the one prisoner who has taken the sentence for all of us. That's what God had promised to Adam and Eve, someone coming from the woman who would crush Satan's power. In the process of crushing Satan he would be bruised for our iniquities, beaten and hung on a cross and tortured in our place. That's our Jesus. The Advent and Christmas season is a time to celebrate the fact that our God made promises to provide us with a righteousness we could never find ourselves or produce on our own. He kept his promise.

2) The Lord provided this alien righteousness

Do you remember the story of E.T, that lovable little creature from outer space that came to live with a totally dysfunctional California family? That lovable alien taught the troubled family something they had never experienced before. They learned about love and kindness and caring. I believe that this film was so popular because such love and kindness is missing in families today. Moms and dads and kids want life to be better than it is. Jesus has come to our world to do much more than teach us what love and caring and kindness are all about as ET did. He came to provide us with the love, kindness, and

caring in the form of perfect righteousness that enables us to be accepted by a perfect and holy God.

Notice how this is pictured with the righteous branch or shoot. "In those days I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land." The stump or line of King David was rotten to the core. People who claimed a bloodline to King David were worshiping idols and killing their kids as sacrifices to these idols. Out of these people who had wandered so far away from God, a little branch would sprout forth to do what is just and right in the land. That was Jesus. A visit to his hometown would reveal a young man who never had evil thoughts about other people, who showed love and kindness to other kids, elderly people, even those who may have hurt him. Galatians 5 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." When we look at this fruit being produced by the Holy Spirit in our lives and see the changes taking place, we also realize it is far from perfect. The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control was always perfect in Jesus.

There are only two kinds of righteousness in the world. There is the righteousness that people try to produce here on this earth that never measures up to God's standards. That is why Romans 3 bluntly says, "There is none that does good, no not one." Then there is the alien righteousness that comes to us from God as free gift of his love. Romans 10 says, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." When you stand before God in the final judgment you can be dressed in one of two ways. You can wear your own righteousness the Bible calls filthy rags, and you will get the boot. Or you can clothe yourself and take on, and believe in the righteousness that our heavenly Father as provided you in Jesus his Son, the shoot that came from David's line.

What future bride would think of going to her father and saying, "Dad can I have the rags in the garage? I want to sew a wedding dress from these rags." Imagine the embarrassment of everyone at the wedding when she stands next to her bridegroom dressed in these rags. That's how ugly and foolish we look on judgment day if we expect Jesus the bridegroom to take his bride, dressed in her rags of sin. No Jesus pays the price to wash us clean, and then clothes us with his righteousness, a totally alien righteousness that is not found in us, but found in him.

What are the results of having this righteousness? Our text says, "In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety." If your hope and my hope is based in Jesus and what he has done for us, then we live in absolute safety and security. Our hour of death and the end of the world can come, and we are ready to meet the Lord. As we sing in the hymn, "Jesus your blood and righteousness, Your beauty are my glorious dress. Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed. With joy shall I lift up my head." Not only are you secure for the hour of death or judgment, but also secure for every day of life on this earth. Isaiah 61 says, "I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Every day of life on this earth become like the first dance together as husband and wife, with Jesus as the bride, and we the church his beloved bridegroom." Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So beautiful is his alien righteousness that we wear each day, we actually enjoy showing it off to each other and exulting in it. "This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord our Righteousness." What a beautiful name. Wouldn't that be a great name for a congregation such as ours, "The Lord Our Righteousness Evangelical Lutheran Church?" A little long, but how descriptive of who we are and the security we have in Jesus' righteousness, an alien righteousness, completely outside of ourselves. Amen.