

December 2, 2012
Advent 1

"The Lord Is Our 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.'

On December 15th a twelve year old girl will be coming to Santa Barbara to sing at the Grenada Theater. Tickets are on sale for between \$50 and \$150 each. Jackie Evancho, this twelve year old girl with the amazing soprano voice, will be singing songs from silver screen. Those who heard her audition on "America's Got Talent" two years ago could not believe that such a beautiful soprano voice could come from such a little girl. They even asked if someone else was singing while she was lip synching. We marvel at how talented some children are in music, art, and sports even at a young age. We say they are phenomenal.

The Old Testament predicted the days were coming when a phenomenal child would be born in this human race. You know the verse well: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." When we look at the Baby Jesus resting in the manger in Bethlehem we see a tiny child who is our Lord and God from all eternity. We also see a phenomenal child who will live the perfect or righteous life we could never live and die the perfect and righteous death on the cross for our sin. This amazing and wonderful child will offer his righteousness to us as a free gift in place of our unrighteousness so our God can accept us and love us for all eternity. I consider it such an honor and privilege to speak to you this morning about Jesus as "The Lord our Righteousness."

The Lord promised us righteousness

Embedded deeply into every part of the Old Testament is God's promise to provide the world with a Savior who will bless the world with his righteousness. "'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.'" The Hebrew word here for promise is "dabar." It can be translated as "word" or "thing." When God speaks his Word or promise it is equal to something already existing and coming into reality. If I promise to give you a hundred dollars, that does not become real until you have it in your hand. When God promised to send a Savior, the reality of the blessings of Jesus and his righteousness already existed for God's Old Testament people. Another example of this is God's promise to you of eternal life in Jesus. It is a done deal. It already exists. It is a present reality.

The Lord gave the promise that a righteous Branch would shoot forth from David's line.

"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is right and just in the land." Think of a tree that has become diseased. It falls down and then is destroyed by termites, rot and decay. Out of the stump of that tree comes a shoot that grows into a tree far more beautiful than the tree that was destroyed. The nation of Israel was like a tree that was cut down and destroyed. At the time of Jeremiah it was a nation where the worship of Baal was more exciting and thrilling for people than the worship of the true God. From that nation came a tiny shoot, a little child born in Bethlehem, who would build a kingdom that would last forever.

Things did not look very good in Jerusalem when Jeremiah spoke these words. In the earlier part of this chapter Jeremiah told the people the royal palaces and fancy homes that had been torn down to defend the city against siege ramps would be filled with dead bodies. The people worshiped God in the morning, but they could not wait for evening to come when they could burn their incense to the false god Baal. In the midst of the worst days of Israel's idolatry, there was always that hope that things would be changed when the Messiah came. God promises a righteous Branch who will do what is right and just in the land.

Remember *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. How dismal, cold and dark the land of Narnia was under the spell of the wicked witch. The people suffered terribly. But always there was hope that some day the great lion Aslan would come and rescue his people from the evil that had come into their land.

It is so hard to live in a land where evil and wickedness abound. We love to hear the good stories such as the police officer in New York who was photographed by a tourist putting boots on the feet of a homeless man, boots he had purchased with his own money. The Friday morning Santa Barbara News Press carried on its pages the news about trials going on in Santa Barbara, Santa Maria and Lompoc for gang members accused of killing other people. What hurts us most is not the evil we read about in the papers, or the evil we hear on the news. What hurts us most is the evil we see in our own hearts. We may not worship idols like Baal but that does not mean we are free from the sin of idolatry. We fail to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our mind. We fail at loving our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. With Paul we confess "I know that in me that is in my flesh, dwells no good thing." We cannot find any righteousness inside of us that would make us worthy of God's love.

God promised to send a righteous Branch from the line of David who would do what was right and just in the land. See that tiny little Branch that was born from the Virgin Mary and then laid to rest in the manger in Bethlehem. He is phenomenal in the way he excelled not at music, or sports, or art, but at doing what was right and just in the land. Peter describes Jesus with these words, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness." No person ever born from the human race lived the way Jesus lived. Parents loved to bring their children to Jesus, and children loved to be in his arms. Hebrews tells us he was tempted in all parts as we are, yet without sin. The Father could say of Jesus at his Baptism, "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." What joy Jesus the righteous Branch brought into the lives of his parents Mary and Joseph.

To expand on this thought of Jesus as the righteous Branch that emerges from the fallen human race, permit me to offer this illustration. A family decides to plant a plum tree in the back corner of their yard. The tree grows and flourishes. There are lots of flowers in the spring and fruit follows. The children cannot wait until the plums ripen. The dad takes the first plum that ripens and puts his teeth into it and the juice runs down his mouth, but then he spits it out. It is the most foul-tasting food he has ever put in his mouth. Just tasting it makes him sick and poisons him. He tells the kids to stay away from the fruit. He picks the fruit and tosses it into the trash and cuts down the tree into small pieces and puts them into the green waste. Later that summer, he notices a new branch coming from the original root stock of the plum tree. The leaves are different. They are very beautiful, not like the other tree. Next spring there are lots of blossoms. The fruit sets and then it ripens. He cautiously tastes the first fruit that is ripe. It is the most heavenly tasting food he has ever put into his mouth. He eats more. The next day he feels so much better. His aches and pains are gone. Not only is the fruit tasty but it heals his body. Even his gray hair is gone.

I know you see the point of this illustration. We are the tree that is cut down because of sin that has come into our lives and made us unacceptable to God and even toxic to each other. Didn't the first child ever born into this world kill his brother? From this fallen, corrupt and perishing human race a child is born who is perfect and holy and pure. Does he come with his righteousness to make us even more aware of our unrighteousness? No he has come as the righteous Branch to credit us with his righteousness and give us the privilege of living forever in his love.

The Lord provides us with righteousness

The time is coming and the time is here right now when people all over the world are claiming they are saved not by righteousness they find in themselves, but a righteousness they find outside of themselves in Christ. "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.'" Instead of being a people that are beaten down and thrown into captivity by the Babylonians, the Lord predicts a time when the people of God will walk around proudly boasting of a righteousness that they were given as a free gift in Jesus God's Son. Isaiah 61 says the Christians of every age will jump up and down and dance for joy that they are covered by Christ righteousness. "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

Martin Luther loved to preach and teach about this righteousness we have outside of ourselves that is found in Christ. He fondly described it as an alien righteousness. Remember the first time you saw the movie *ET*? A dysfunctional California family found hope in the unconditional love of an extraterrestrial being. Nothing in our human experience compares to the love, righteousness, purity, forgiveness and hope we have in Jesus the righteous branch.

Jesus' righteousness is now your righteous. You can live in safety and live securely in the land. If they world comes to an end this week, you know where you will be because of Jesus' righteousness. You will be with Jesus in the place he has prepared for us. And if the world does not come to an end this week, you are still safe and secure in the love that Jesus has for you. Jesus is your bridegroom. You are his bride, the church. He washed

you clean. He replaced your rags of unrighteousness with his robe of righteousness. His love for is very intense and personal. Romans 8 makes the sweeping statement that "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This past week we heard about two people who shared in lottery winnings worth over 550 million dollars. Think of all the people who wish they had won that money, thinking it would bring them greater joy and peace in life. Here you are this morning, the richest people in the world because you are able to say "The Lord is my righteousness." May the Lord grant us his Holy Spirit to share this good news with those who do not know it! Amen.