

Bible Tuesday for Advent I, 2018

Jeremiah 33:14-16

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 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. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

This portion of the prophecy of Jeremiah is about Judah's restoration. It follows Jeremiah's prophecies against the Southern Kingdom as they fall to Babylonia. Jeremiah's words about the restoration regard not only rebuilding the city of Jerusalem but also restoring David's line to the throne, and the priesthood and the Levites to their proper worship duties in the Temple and synagogues. This text describes a descendant from David who will act as judge and enforcer for all Israel.

"...righteousness" – This word in Hebrew can also be translated "vindicator". That is, one who vindicates makes others righteous. The coming Davidic king will make judged, condemned Israel and Judah righteous before God.

Psalm 25:1-10

1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. 3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. 4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. 5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

This is an acrostic psalm, alternating praise with petition. The psalmist calls upon God's fealty to the covenant God made with humanity. The psalmist does not claim worthiness of God's attention, but rather looks to God's faithfulness to His covenant.

"Mindful" – a Hebrew word meaning both "remembering" and "mulling over". The psalmist prays that God remembers his loyalty to the covenant but does not remember/mull over the psalmist's own sins.

The psalmist states that a humble attitude is needed to be led by God and to accept God's teaching.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

The first letter to the congregation in Thessalonica is the oldest portion of the New Testament, written in approximately 54 AD. Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus/Silas traveled together to Thessalonica after being driven from Philippi. Their evangelism was received favorably by a small group who formed a little congregation. However, fierce opposition arose from the Jewish community which drove them away, Paul to Athens, and Timothy and Silas to Borea. Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the congregation. While they were devout and surviving the local opposition, they were anxious for the strong leadership the three evangelists gave them. Like Corinthians, there is speculation that 1 Thessalonians is a combination of two or three letters.

Through Paul's blessings and prayers, the above passage makes clear Paul's devotion to this fledgling congregation. Paul prays that God would bring him back to Thessalonica.

Luke 21:25-36

25 "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. 26 People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. 28 Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. 31 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. 34 "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, 35 like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. 36 Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

This passage is Luke's version of the gospel lesson we had last Sunday. It is Palm Sunday afternoon. Jesus is dismounted from the donkey and is now walking into the Temple with the apostles and disciples. One of the followers marvels at the outer walls of the Temple, saying, "What large stones!" and Jesus replies, "You see this? All will be torn down; not one

stone will be left upon another.” The disciples ask, “When will this be and what will be the signs?” This is Jesus’ reply to that question in Luke’s gospel.

Jesus replies that the whole cosmos will be in turmoil when The Day of the Lord comes. “The powers of heaven” refers to the lesser gods of other religions who will be unseated on this Day. Terrifying signs to be sure. But Jesus instructs his followers to “raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near.” Don’t let your fear curl you into a fetal position! Stand up and lift your head in hope and expectation!

The fig tree has long been a symbol of the kingdom of Israel, as well as a common fruit tree. When trees leaf out, you know summer is coming. So, when the powers of the world get scary, you know that salvation is coming. We must not let our fear, feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and anxiety overwhelm us, or apathy lull us into lethargy. No, the baptized must look for signs of God at work in the world at all times. We must be ready to face Jesus in every moment of our day.