

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16 - “Advent Promise”**

- Pastor Kari Pancoast

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, Thanksgiving is done and it's onto Christmas! The turkey is gone—the leftovers have been made into soup. The fall decorations have been put away. There are only 26 shopping days until Christmas. Lights and trees and decorations are up all over town. Christmas has begun. Now that Thanksgiving is over, the world around us has moved on to Christmas. The world around us is already busy with Christmas preparations, celebrations and festivities. But not us; for those of us in the church it is not yet Christmas. We are still waiting for Christmas—and not just for the celebrations and parties, programs and family gatherings—we're still waiting for the coming of our savior. So, we in the church, are now in this time called Advent—a time of waiting and hope and promise.

Advent is an important time of year—a wonderful time of year—as it causes us to slowdown and to think about the “why and what” of all of our Christmas celebrations and festivities that others are already busy crossing off their lists. It would be so easy to just get caught up in the excitement and busyness of the season and run from party to program to concert to shopping trip to party until it is Christmas Day and the meal is done and the presents are opened and it's time to take down the tree. Then we'd look around and wonder what happened and why we did all of this anyway.

Even though we in the church know better—even though we know that Christmas is really about Jesus' birth and we send cards that say things like “Jesus is the reason for the season” or “keep Christ in Christmas,” it is just so easy to get caught up in the way the world has hijacked Christmas and has turned it into merely a celebration of family and friends, gift-giving and feasting.

So, we in the church, observe this time of Advent, this time of hopeful waiting when we remember the faithfulness of our gracious God who comes to us in the promised Savior, Jesus the Christ. We observe this time of Advent to prepare us for the celebration that is Christmas—the celebration of Immanuel, God-with-us; the celebration of our Savior coming to us, so that in him we will have forgiveness, hope and new life.

*“I will take what looks to be dead and I will give new life.”* God says to us as he promises us a savior. *“I will take what looks to be hopeless and I will give new hope and a promise of faithfulness. I will cause a Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. You, my people, will be saved. You, my city, will live in safety.”* God speaks these words to his people through the prophet Jeremiah during a dire time in their history. The armies of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar are about to take over their city, Jerusalem, and the people destroyed, taken as slaves or scattered as exiles.

The Israelites had always been taught that God had chosen King David's line to sit on the throne and had promised that David's reign would be forever. But now, the Babylonians have ended that. Jerusalem, the city of David has been destroyed, the temple burned and the throne taken from David's heirs, who had to flee the country. It seems like God's promises have died. God's faithfulness has failed.

But now, to a people devastated by loss, God's prophet Jeremiah speaks a word of hope: *“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.*” All might seem lost, but God still is faithful. The house of David might be cut down, but God is able to bring life out of death. A branch will sprout. This branch will do more than just restore the city of Jerusalem and give life and safety to the Israelites of that day. This branch is to be the savior of the whole world—this branch is the Messiah, the Savior who will give life and safety to all people in all times and in all places.

We are not unlike those Israelites. We see evidence around us each day of the attempt to kill God’s promises. We see the presence of evil in the world. Our own nation is at war, our economy is in dire straits, our loved ones or even we ourselves suffer from illnesses that threaten to take our life. Our neighbors don’t have enough to eat. We have children in our own community who are without a home. Jobs are being lost. Families are falling apart. Tragedies suffered. I could go on and on. We see and know and feel the presence of evil all around us—the presence of the one who wishes to be the death of God’s promises. All the evidence around us would say that God’s reign has ended. God’s promises are dead.

But, the words that God spoke to his people in the midst of their hopelessness, through the prophet Jeremiah, are words that are spoken to us, as well. They are words of hope and promise for us. *“I will take what looks to be dead and I will give new life.”* God says to us as he promises us a savior.

God looks on us in our hopelessness, in our broken world that wishes to tear us away from his love, and he is faithful to us because he made us to be his own. He has mercy on us and he speaks his promise to us. *“I will take what looks to be hopeless and I will give new hope and a promise of faithfulness.” “I will cause a Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. You, my people, will be saved. You, my city, will live in safety.”*

The fulfillment of this promise is what we wait for in Advent—what we celebrate at Christmas. God is faithful to us! He doesn’t leave us hopeless and helpless in this sinful and broken world. But he comes to us—to give us hope and new life. He comes to us in the babe whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. He comes to us in the new life and forgiveness we have in him each day. And he comes to us in the promise of his return in the fulfillment of time.

So, hear this Advent promise as God says to us, *“See this stump? To you it looks dead—like all hope and life is lost. But even from this dead stump I can bring life! Life that is for you and for all people!” “Life that is Jesus the Savior!”*

Thanks be to God. Amen.