

Sermon Draft

Text: Jeremiah 33:14–16

Sermon: “What a Day!”

As we look back over our lives, chances are several days stand out. Not all days are equal. Some soon fade into the mix. Others continue to stand out. The day our daughter Nicole was born and died; the joy quickly turned into sorrow. Then two more special days when Jeremy and Sam were born. We all have days in our lives that stand out personally. A special family vacation, our wedding day. The day our favorite team won the big game. Some of you remember vividly the day JFK was shot, or the day the space shuttle Challenger exploded. Most remember the events of September 11, 2001. Some other day of tragedy or loss or day of great celebration that has forever been seared in our memory. Some days are more important than others.

In our Old Testament Reading, Jeremiah speaks to the people of Jerusalem about some supremely important, crucial, stand-out days. “Those days” sound like some pretty great days. Jeremiah declared that “those days” are coming, but here in this house of worship, gathered here before this cross, we celebrate that “those days” have already come.

They came with the advent of Jesus Christ. Two thousand years ago, God was walking around in our world in human flesh. Jesus came preaching the good news of God's kingdom, healing the sick and driving out demons, suffering and dying for our sins on the cross, rising on the third day, and ascending to the Father. Those were the days, the days when our Savior, Jesus, walked visibly in our world and won our salvation. They are the most important days this world has ever seen. They are the centerpiece of human history. Jesus' days on earth are "Those Days" that bring meaning and hope to all other days, before and since.

Jeremiah the prophet pointed the people toward "those days." But the people of Jeremiah's time, like people in every age, were more interested in their own days, in the right-now needs of their own lives. "These are the days. These are the days that count . . . to me. These are my days. I have rent to pay and health concerns and a difficult boss. I have retirement investments to navigate, political causes to espouse, hobbies to pursue, and favorite sports teams to root for. I have mouths to feed, grass to mow, cars to fix. Jeremiah, talk to me about these days. These are the days I care about."

And in the press of such concerns, countless Israelites had turned aside to other sources of help. They neglected the words of God's prophets; they abandoned the worship of God. Instead, they turned to false gods and false prophets. They turned to prophets whose messages focused on the here and now. They turned to the gods of the neighboring peoples, gods whose worship focused on guaranteeing a good crop for this year, or on protecting them from current dangers, or on multiplying the number of their herds. Century after century this had gone on the Israelites forsaking their God to run after false gods and focus on their right-now needs. And century after century, God had sent true prophets to his people to warn them and to turn them back, to call them back to hope in God's promises for "those days" the coming days of the Messiah.

Finally, in Jeremiah's generation, God's patience with Jerusalem ended. In punishment for their unbelief and idolatry, God announced that he would bring the Babylonians against Jerusalem. He told Jeremiah he had made up his mind to destroy the city, and nothing could change it.

That was the situation in which our text this morning was spoken. Jeremiah had announced to the people that a great destruction was coming, sent by God's own hand: the unstoppable armies of Babylon. To the people of Jerusalem in this desperate situation, Jeremiah speaks the words of our text:

“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 [in his days] Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely” (vs 14–16).

What kind of a reaction do you suppose Jeremiah got to these wonderful words of promise? Well, most of the people despised him! “Get out of here, Jeremiah, and take your irrelevant, someday-down-the-road promises with you! We don't need a God who will help us ‘in those days.’ We're tired of a God who says, ‘The days are coming.’ We need prophets who will speak about peace for this day! If you haven't noticed, Jeremiah, there are like a million Babylonians outside these walls, every one of them armed to the teeth.

They are planning to kill us or carry us off into slavery, and all your God has to tell us is that ‘the days are coming’ when he will fulfill his promises? Jeremiah, we don’t care about ‘those days.’”

It wasn’t long before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, as Jeremiah had foretold. That beautiful city of God was torn apart, her great walls toppled, the temple of God looted and destroyed. The prince of the city was taken before the Babylonian general, who killed his sons right before his eyes and then ordered that his eyes be gouged out. And he and most of the people were led away in chains to a life of exile in far-off Babylon.

But those few among them who still placed their hopes in the promises of God’s Word through Jeremiah were not to be disappointed. In spite of present hardship bitter hardship, they clung to God’s sweet promises. In spite of present hardship, and maybe partly because of present hardship, they set their hearts not on their own day, but on the days which were coming.

“The days are coming,” God promised. And come they did. Six hundred years later at God’s own perfect time God made a new branch sprout from the line of King David.

His name was Jesus, God's own Son, and he came to Judah and to Jerusalem to fulfill every promise God had made to them. He conquered death and sin and hell. He restored the relationship between God and his people. He won eternal victory for God's people over all their enemies, eternal security for them, eternal joy, an eternal kingdom.

"Those days" Jesus' days, are God's source of true help and comfort for his people also for us, living in 2021. The significance and power of Jesus' earthly life extends far beyond the day when he ascended to the Father and was hidden by the clouds. The saving strength and merciful favor of God for you today is rooted and anchored in "those days" in the life and work of Jesus Christ, come in the flesh for you, two thousand years ago.

That's why the Church observes a church year, a liturgical year, year after year, rehearsing the life of Christ, over and over again. From Advent and Christmas and Epiphany, to Lent and Easter, and Ascension and Pentecost, our Scripture readings and hymns direct our attention to the saving life and work of Jesus Christ. The church year directs our attention to "those days," which God tells us are the most important days for us.

And so, as we begin another church year today on this First Sunday in Advent, we fix our eyes, we set our hearts, on “those days.”

Those are the days that truly matter most. As we hear from the Scriptures about Jesus’ life of love two thousand years ago, we encounter his revelation of God’s true heart, his profound love, and the true pattern and meaning of life. As we eat this bread which is his body and drink this cup which is his blood, we do so in remembrance of the days of Christ’s saving work; we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Because of Jesus’ death two thousand years ago, all of our sin and guilt is removed today. At the baptismal font, as our Lord gives us new life in Holy Baptism, he does so by the power of Christ’s resurrection. Because of his resurrection two thousand years ago, we have the pledge of eternal life and glory today.

Some days are more important than others, more outstanding, more special, more crucial. For those who know Jesus, those days, his days, are the most important and dear of all.

This morning we've been looking backward, to the days of Jesus. But there is another great day; Jesus calls it "that day." That day is yet coming, our Lord Jesus has promised us, when the heavens above will be shaken, and we will see Jesus coming on the clouds with power and great glory. Even as we fix our eyes on those days two thousand years ago, the days of our Lord Jesus, we also watch for that day, just as our Lord encourages us. And when we do see him coming on the clouds, ***"straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near"*** (Luke 21:28)!

Because of his saving work for us at his first coming, when Jesus comes a second time, he will raise up all the dead, and he will give eternal life and a place in his eternal kingdom to all who trust in him. Thousands and thousands of his saints will rise from the dust on that day, and we will shine with them like the stars forever and ever. Jeremiah will be there, and those who trusted Jeremiah's words. ***"In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely"*** (v 16). On that day, all our troubles will be at an end. And God will reign forever and ever. Oh, what a day! Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Amen.