

# Sermons from

## First Congregational Church

### of Southington

The Days are Surely Coming  
Jeremiah 33.14-16  
November 29, 2015  
The First Sunday of Advent  
Lisa Eleck

++++++

Jeremiah 33.14-16

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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."

++++++

"Are we there yet?" It's a common question children ask when the family is on a road trip. I know I have heard it and I have even thought it myself when traveling. It can also be a question we ask when we are waiting for a minister to get to the point in a long drawn out sermon, "Are we there yet?"

Well, in the passage from this morning's scripture, Jeremiah, the prophet, tells the people of Judah and Jerusalem that the Lord says "the days are surely coming" when he will cause a "righteous Branch to spring up from David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." And the people of Judah and Jerusalem are likely asking, "Are we there yet." Is it time yet? because their world was in awful shape.

Jerusalem has been conquered by the Babylonians. The people have been enslaved, their land has been pillaged and they have been brutally attacked. Some of them have even been forced to leave Jerusalem, to live in exile in Babylon. In fact, when we look back through the book of Jeremiah, we will find that God had been telling Jeremiah to tell the people of Judah and Jerusalem that they would be conquered because they had been disobedient to God. They had been worshipping other gods and oppressing the poor for generations. So God was angry and was punishing the people he had loved and rescued from slavery in the time of Moses. He even told Jeremiah to tell the people to go ahead-get married, set up homes, and plant gardens in the land of exile because they will be there for 70 years. 70 years. That's a very long time.

And Jeremiah has been the bearer of all this bad news. As we have heard many times before in the Old Testament, Jeremiah did not think he was the man for the job, did not see himself as a prophet. When God called Jeremiah he said, "Ah, Lord God! I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But God had other ideas and told Jeremiah "Do not say, I am only a boy, for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you."

So Jeremiah had become the bearer of a really difficult message for the Jews. And they did not want to hear about all that God was allowing their neighbors to inflict upon them. So they threaten to kill Jeremiah twice and actually do put him under house arrest. But as is common for the prophets, Jeremiah at first responds to God’s call because God tells him that he has to. But then Jeremiah listens to God’s feelings. God tells Jeremiah how he feels like a scorned husband and how he feels like a scorned parent. He asks Jeremiah what he has done to deserve the lack of faith from the people that he has loved. How could they worship Ba’al the Canaanite god and other gods? How could his beloved people not follow his laws? How could they oppress others?

Jeremiah has listened to God pour out his feelings - hurt and anger. I believe that Jeremiah has heard God’s pain. I believe that he has felt it. And while I was reading Jeremiah, I thought to myself, “I would not want to be Jeremiah. I would not want his job.”

But then I thought about how we all feel God’s pain. And we are all called to be share God’s message. I believe we all felt God’s pain when we heard of the bombings and acts of terror in Paris and Beirut. We all felt God’s pain when we saw the stories of Syrian refugees leaving their country by the thousands, fleeing the violence that engulfed their home land. We especially felt God’s pain when we saw one particularly poignant front page news photo of a Syrian father carrying his son who had drowned when the ship they were on sank. And perhaps, perhaps we even felt God’s pain this week when we heard that some US officials now want to make it harder for those Syrian refugees, victims of violence, to come to our country to start a new life.

And recently, as many of you may know, there were demonstrations by students of color at Yale (where I am divinity school student) protesting racism at Yale. I don’t know if any of you know the Yale campus, but the Divinity school is up the hill, set apart, away from the main campus. But that does not mean the divinity school is immune from the issues of racism. We actually had an open forum where my fellow students, students of color, shared their experiences, their sadness, anger, and feelings of oppression. I believe God feels that pain too.

But God, in the book of Jeremiah, had a plan. God spoke a new word to Jeremiah. In chapter 29, we hear a glimmer of hope. And we hear God’s reassurance that He is there for his people. God told Jeremiah to tell the people, “I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord,”

And in this morning’s passage, God is promising something newer still. He is telling his people that “In those days, he will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he will execute Justice and Righteousness.” We, as Christians, believe Jeremiah is talking about the Messiah, about Jesus, who will come in righteousness. Jeremiah is offering hope.

This week I heard hope. While I saw heard stories of sadness, I also heard hope. I heard it at a wonderful service in the Chapel at Yale. And I heard it from one of my fellow students, Kevin. He is a sensitive, caring young Black man, about the age of my daughters who gave his sermon for our class last week. He spoke of his experiences of racism when he was denied a job which was then given to a white person, of being stopped by police for being a young black man walking through the city. And in his sermon, Kevin spoke of responding in the past with silence. But now he knows he has to use his voice.

He used scripture. He spoke with such conviction. In his sermon I heard his pain and his strength. As I sat there, I honestly thought I was in the presence of a future MLK Jr. (which one of my classmates even voiced when we critiqued his sermon - and there were no negative comments.)

In Kevin's words, I found hope. This young man, a victim of racism, this young man who welcomed my daughter and granddaughter with his amazing smile when they came to have lunch me, who encouraged me before I gave my first sermon, and who hugged me afterward. He gave me hope - hope for him as a future minister and leader, filled with gentleness, strength and great faith, and for us as a people.

And hope is our message from Jeremiah. Hope is our message for Advent. We journey through Advent in hope. We know that as we recall Jesus birth at Christmas, there is joy and hope in the memory of a new infant. But we believe that Jesus is God incarnate, come to share our humanity, and that he is born in each of us. And we also know that Jesus, that shoot from the line of David, told us that He is the vine and we are the branches. We are shoots from the vine of Jesus. So, just as he shares our humanity and accompanies us on our journeys, we share in Jesus' ministry. We are challenged by it, to bring righteousness and hope to the world.

And I have seen it. I have seen it in Kevin and so many young men and women at YDS. But I have also seen it here at FCCS.- in individuals who shared their Time, Talent and Treasure Testimonies, in Steven Ministers who share the journeys of those in need, in teachers who share their faith with children, in deacons, board and committee members, and even those who are not on boards or committees but who have welcomed me into this church family.

Sometimes God asks us to welcome the stranger, sometimes He asks us to stand in solidarity, sometimes She asks us to use our voices or our hands to support others.

Those days are surely coming says the Lord... Are we there yet?

No, we cannot say we are there yet. But when we use our voices and our hands to bring God's love, God is truly with us and we are building a world of righteousness and of hope – one voice, one person, one community at a time. Let it be so.