

## JEREMIAH 33:14-16

### “Pre Christmas Sale: Today’s Special – HOPE”

Advent 1, 9am Wesley 29 Nov 2009

Rev David Thiem

The season of Advent is a season of hope. Something is dawning on the horizon of our lives – can we see it? The very meaning of the season is about something or someone coming. The word *advent* is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, which literally means *coming* or, we have said ‘coming event’.

In this Advent season, the church lifts its collective head and squints toward the horizon. We take a long view, turning our gaze toward that which is approaching. On this first Sunday of Advent, our view may be a little cloudy. The horizon is far away, and although we can see that something is happening, we cannot quite make out what it is.

To discern what is approaching, we listen to the words of the prophet Jeremiah. His words excite us because he promises salvation: “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” (v. 15). The name of this approaching one is “righteousness.” – ‘do saving acts’

Thus, in Advent, the church proclaims the approaching righteousness of God. It is a crucial proclamation because it is a real source of hope. The world, our lives, our days cannot live without hope. Anticipating what God is going to do energizes us for faithful and fruitful living.

Ironically, we anticipate the future by remembering the past. We remember the glory days of Israel under King David’s leadership. We strain forward in order to see a “righteous Branch” spring forth. But this is a particular kind of remembering. In this season we do not remember that which has happened in the past in an historic sense. We remember in a way that changes us. It is the memory of a lover’s kiss, the memory of a child returning home after too long an absence, the memory of the words of forgiveness for some wrong committed. The power of this kind of memory can make us cry or laugh or even feel contentment. It is memory that never grows old. We tell the stories of it again and again because each time we tell the story we experience the power of the memory in our lives.

Each year the season of Advent calls the community of faith to prepare for the visit of God’s salvation. Our work is to anticipate that which God will do to bring fulfilment to all people. We are preparing for the event in the stable at Bethlehem which brings together “the hopes and fears of all the years,” as Phillips Brooks’s “O Little Town of Bethlehem” so beautifully puts it.

Hope is never cheap. It demands the great energy of faith. This is true because we need hope when we face desperate circumstances. Jeremiah draws on the deep energy of his own faith as he proclaims that “the days are coming” (v. 14a NKJV). It must have been a difficult ministry because he was speaking to people who had lost hope. Exiles in a strange land do not find hope easily. Into this condition of lostness, the prophet dares to speak his word of hopeful newness that will come to pass because of God’s salvation. Like Jeremiah, the church must draw on its energy of faith as it offers to the world a vision of the newness that God brings in the birth of Christ. The proclamation must be bold so that our anticipation can be without hesitation. “The days are coming,” and we must make ready. So, lift your heads and let your hearts be strengthened. God is doing a new thing, and to us has come the joyous and holy task of helping the world get ready for the most blessed event of history! Christ’s birth.