

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Occasion: First Sunday in Advent, 28 Nov 2021

Branching Out of Righteousness

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In ancient Israel, people were awaiting their Messiah; a king who would take up the throne of Israel and bring them into everlasting prosperity. When they saw Jesus ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, they witnessed this happening. The prophecy for a Messianic king in the line of King David had been around for a long time. In fact, it dates back to when David was still alive (2 Sam 7:16) around a thousand years before Jesus was born in the manger. It took a long time before the Israelites received their kingly Messiah in the manger, and it will take some time for us before we receive Jesus back on earth on the Last Day. We do not know the day or hour that Jesus will return but we know that our heavenly king will return upon the clouds and deliver all Christians from death through the resurrection. Yet, although we are waiting for Christ's second coming, our heavenly king is still present in your life now, giving you new growth.

Our reading from Jeremiah (33:14-16) talks about Jesus as a king in the line of David coming forth like the growth of a new branch. The coming of the Messiah would be a branching out of fresh life in the midst of the people of God. It would bring righteousness to the people plagued by evil. The people of Israel had seen a lot of sin—sins coming both themselves and others. By definition, sin is unrighteousness. So, Christ, as the righteous branch of the Lord, is the destroyer of sin. The growth of righteousness in Christ born from sinful Israelites is from the deadened stump of sin. Christ takes that which was wicked and perverted to make something healthy and alive. We, like the people of Israel, were once dead in our trespasses and sins but through Christ we are made alive (Eph 2:1, 5).

Therefore, when I think about the sprouting of the Branch of David, I picture the sprout coming from a barren stump. The tree died long ago and was cut down to be used as firewood. The stump which was left to rot without hope. Yet, God provided hope for the stump when He caused good growth to shoot forth from within the deadened wood. A branch comes to replace the stump with fresh wood and green leaves pointed toward the light. The plant has been made right once more.

The people of Israel had committed grave sins against the Lord. They had been saved by God and were nourished in life in the land of Israel, yet the people turned away from the source of life toward the desires of their own hearts. Therefore, God cut them off from life as a logger would cut down a tree. The Jeremiah passage speaking about the righteous branch of David comes

shortly before the nation of Israel is conquered by the Babylonians. Those who perished, died in their sins and face eternal judgment for their evils. Yet, despite the nation of Israel working against God and being cut down by the Lord for it, God saved the remnants of the people of Israel. He caused a righteous branch to sprout from them. Our Father in heaven sent His only begotten Son into the world to deliver those who believe in him from eternal judgment. This Jesus does by producing righteousness within us.

We who were once similar to the sinful Israelites—following the sinful desires of our own hearts—were made righteous. Christ cleansed us from sin so we would be right with God and sprout forth goodness. The righteousness of Christ is not only him acting rightly before God but Christ also making us right before our God. Jesus does not keep his righteousness to himself but pours forth his righteousness into the world to be received through faith. The entirety of God’s people rest secure in Christ’s righteousness.

You were as dead as a cut down tree. All that was left was a stump struggling to survive, and Christ brought forth new growth from you through faith. While you might hope it to be enough just to be saved from death, Jesus desires to work more righteousness through you. When He gives you new growth—new life—Jesus gives to you his life, his righteousness. As it is written, *for our sake [God] made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Cor 5:21). Christ’s life in you is making you holy and perfect before God simply by receiving him; and, beyond the reception of forgiveness and life, Jesus’ life dwelling in you urges you unto righteousness.

If you are in Christ, you do good works. God has shaped and fashioned you from the womb to the present day so you may display His righteousness to the world. This means performing the good works He has created you to do in this world (Eph 2:10). Turning away from good works is to turn away from the path of righteousness. Jesus has caused new growth in you; why would you return to the chopping block to be cut down in judgment? You would be willingly undoing all the growth that you have received through Christ. At the foundation of your growth is a gaining of forgiveness out of God’s love. He also supplies you with joy, peace, patience, and hope. You hope that the growth of righteousness—that is, the reception of God’s goodness and your consequent right living—you hope the growth of your righteousness persists until you see your Lord return upon the clouds on the Last Day. You hope that he draws your body up from the grave, breathes life back into newly grown flesh, and says to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” We all desire new growth—goodness in our lives of faith, not a turning back to sinful practices and inner lusts.

It is sad to say that, for us, wicked deeds seem to be unavoidable. Although we have all received new growth in Christ, it comes from the same sinful stump we always were. The sinful nature in us battles against the work of Christ in us and tries to forsake the righteousness of God. It is hard

to live a sinless life—and I would say it is impossible this side of heaven. However, we have hope in the righteous branch of Christ. Not only does Jesus bring about righteousness, he executes justice. He judges our sins to be evil and wicked, stemming from a sinful heart, so he does what any sensible gardener does: he trims the tree.

When there are growths that suck up nutrients needed elsewhere, when there are branches which grow in ways they are not supposed to, and when there are branches which have become infected by disease: they should be cut off. Christ has come into our lives to free us from sin and bring us forth into righteousness. This of course means causing good and right growth in our Christian lives, directing our path to follow our good and righteous Lord, but Christ does more than cause new growth. Jesus makes you righteous by cutting off and burning the sinfulness in you. He takes your sin so that you will receive his righteousness. May you desire that Christ snip your evil habits in the bud so you are not tempted to become more and more corrupted by sin. We know that the way of sin is death, but our Lord Jesus Christ will direct us to the path of righteousness.

Jesus said,

⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell... (Mark 9)

Jesus desires to cut that which is deadened by sin out of your life to throw in the fire. Hell is for those who are unrighteous. You are made righteous by Jesus through his forgiveness. You do not belong in hell. Rather than let you be cast into the fires of hell in the final judgment, Jesus has brought you into righteousness. All that is good, all that is blessed belongs to you for you have been made right with God through the work of Christ. His righteousness has branched out within you through his forgiveness at the cross and the hope unto eternal life sprouts from within you. Sin and wickedness have no place in you because Jesus has trimmed them out. For any of us to indulge in our sins any longer would be to invite a punishment not meant for you. Jesus wants only good growth for you.

So, when you do sin, do not call sin “good” and continue in it. Call upon the Lord Jesus so he may come and forgive your sins. It is his forgiveness which separates you from your sin, cutting it out of your life and casting it aside. Sin has no place in you because Christ himself takes it from you. You are left with the righteousness of Jesus which sprouts forth in your life. May your good works be a blessing to others like how Christ’s work for you has been nothing but your blessing. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.