**Sermon Text**: Jeremiah 33:14-16

**Occasion**: First Sunday of Advent, 1 Dec 2024

**The Days Are Coming**

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

***14****“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.****15****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.****16****In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’* (Jer 33)

“The days are coming…in those days and at that time…in those days Judah will be saved.” Yes, there are definitely days of note coming on for us. Yet, for us, the days we are looking forward to are more concerned with holiday preparation. The days of Christmas are coming—days of preparation and celebration. In a sense, those are the same kind of days the hearers of Jeremiah are eagerly expecting. But “those days” in Jeremiah’s time come after many days of suffering and repentance. The people have turned away from God to follow their own way. Therefore, God is sending punishment unto them that they may repent and receive their Saviour in faith. “Those days” Jeremiah is seeking are the days when the Messiah comes to right the wrongs of his people. Those days are when the righteous branch of Jesse will be raised up to defeat the enemies of God by the fruits of his cross. In those days, Christ will begin his reign victorious over sin, death, and hell with the promise of salvation alive and well.

Sadly, with all the pomp and circumstance surrounding our celebration of our Messiah coming, that is, Christmas, the grand preparations can replace the focus of “those” days with busyness. You might be preoccupied with the presents you still have to buy, or plotting out a baking schedule. Perhaps you are arranging menus, song lists, and cleaning regimens in your head as the days of Christmas approach. Undoubtedly, Christmas is a busy season for us. We are in the days of preparation for many get-togethers, celebrations, concerts, and whatever else. There will be many opportunities with friends, family, and coworkers—maybe even strangers. And our congregation is no exception to this rule since our midweek Advent services will begin this Thursday and there will be a tree-trimming and potluck on Dec 14.

Many of you are excited about getting everything done and organized and celebrated. I wouldn’t be surprised if some of you have been at it for a couple weeks already. But this non-stop preparation in the oncoming days with cleaning, cooking, wrapping, attending, eating…this all gets tiresome as you get closer and closer to the day—the big day, Christmas itself. It is not as though we find Christmas and all the trimmings and trappings to be tiresome but that we tire ourselves out as we busy ourselves for weeks at a time.

Just to illustrate the point, I don’t take relaxing vacations. Usually the holidays are times when you cast off the burdens of work to recoup and refresh yourself. But when I travel, I intentionally fill my schedule with all sorts of things to see and places to go. I will fly to a new country for a few weeks, visit more than a dozen cities, going to several museums, galleries, and churches per day. Then I end my vacation more exhausted than when I started. I feel the same thing is often true for many people with the Christmas season.

You look forward to a nice relaxing time with friends and family. You hunger for all the little treats that are made this time of year like gingerbread cookies, and you thirst for the particular beverages laced with chocolate or nutmeg. You desire to make other people happy and receive happiness in return. But we know the days are coming when we exhaust ourselves as things become increasingly hectic when we schedule in every personal, familial, and social event we can. We try so hard to prepare ourselves that not either we wear ourselves out or not everything gets done the way we want.

Why is that? Well, because we distract ourselves from the *reason* for the season with the *preparations* for the season. The reason for the season is love—love for another but most especially love from God. If there is one thing the Christmas season is about it is God’s love. This is when the King of All Creation came into the world to save the world from itself. Christ came in the newborn flesh of a helpless babe in order to be the sacrifice that frees the world from its sins. This self-sacrifice of God in the flesh is what gives Christmas meaning. God was willing to enter into our midst—in the midst of trouble, exhaustion, and pain—that you may be delivered from this worldly wickedness.

And that is a little more in keeping with what Jeremiah means when he talks about “in those days”. Jeremiah’s days are filled with the threat of evil on the horizon. There are those who threaten to take away the peace that is found in his day and age. But God promises that justice will be done and righteousness will prevail. Goodness will be brought back to the land, and that will ultimately come with the coming King. Jeremiah did receive help from his Lord in his day and age, but the greater mercy of our Lord was found at the cross over 600 years later. So, yes, “the days are coming” as the Lord says, but those days can become pretty long.

The same for us, I suppose. The days are coming when we too will find relief for our current woes. Our busy schedules will quiet down in a few weeks. Christmas will come on Dec 25 just like it does every year. But the ultimate fulfilment of the love of Christ has already come. We do not need to wait for it. Christmas presents a particular form of his love with the message of his birth. But the love of Christ is present in all times and all places. There will never come a time when the forgiveness and salvation of our Lord will not come to you through faith. There will never come a time when you seek the Lord and he won’t be found. You don’t need to point forward and say, “In those oncoming days, the Lord will save me.” We simply need a day—any day that the Lord has made. You can rejoice and be glad in this day and in any day for the Lord brings you His love in Christ Jesus within it.

This is important for us to remember as we exhaust ourselves in various preparations or devote ourselves to various shows and parties. The reason for our celebration is not the pleasure we experience from celebrating. We celebrate because of the love the Lord has shown each of us. He has come into this world to call us by name and speak his love and faithfulness to quell all our doubts and insecurities. We celebrate on Christmas because the love we receive in Christ is expressed through the love we share with one another. You are not offering cookies or presents to people merely because you want to feel happy. You should be doing these things because Christ has opened your heart to love people like he loves them.

So, as we meditate on the coming days, we should periodically take a moment to prepare ourselves for the tasks and activities ahead of us. We prepare our houses, our trees, our stockings, and our schedules, so why not prepare our hearts and minds for such things? As St Paul says in our reading from 1 Thessalonians 3:10, *we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face*. When we are readying ourselves for our various get-togethers, we should also be praying to God that all these things be fulfilled for everyone’s good and joy. And if we see people enjoy what is done and we feel some happiness ourselves, we should also give thanks to God in a word of prayer.

In times of happiness, you can thank God that He has brought you what you needed. In times of togetherness, you can thank God for the blessing of company and support. In times of frantic running back and forth, you can pray for God’s guidance and strength that you meet the challenges set before you and love others as yourself. And in times of shortcomings, when things do not go as planned, you can pray to God for mercy and ask Him to lift your spirits in order to continue sharing His love.

In all those types of days, God will be with you. He will give you blessing in Christ Jesus and He will guide you in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. There is calm and there is peace in Him. And for your sake, call upon Him. He never leaves you nor does He stop sharing His love. Be careful not to distract yourself with everything you do as the Christmas season ramps up. It is not about getting thing just how you want it to be. It is about the love of God which comes through Christ Jesus born on Christmas Day.

So, in the coming days leading to Christmas, let us set our eyes on Jesus. Yes, set your eyes on the coming manger scene where Jesus lays with Mary, Joseph, and the various visitors. But also set your eyes on what the manger scene means. It represents the love of God for His people by our Lord coming to dwell with us. The people at the manger could place their fingers in his chubby baby hands, and they could tickle his sides. They could experience their God enfleshed. And they could look forward to when those hands bore holes for nails and when his side was pierced by a spear. Brushing your hands across those wounds would be understanding the love of God in a yet more profound way. But regardless of what image you have of Christ in these days as Christmas comes, dwell in the peace of the Lord where He makes His love known to you by dwelling with you each and every day and unto eternity. Amen.

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