

The First Sunday of Advent
December 2, 2018

Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

Theme: “Rescue Us!”

“Help me, save me, rescue me!” This could be your cry if you are in a burning building with no way out. You could jump to your death or you could die in the smoke and the flames, not a very good choice. But then the fireman puts himself at risk to bring you safety. Rescue! Wonderful!

We may face some desperate situationd in life. It could be fire. It could be violence. It could be an accident and something like a tornado that comes ripping through your neighborhood. The winds are roaring, the waters are rising, the flames are intensifying. Rescue is needed. You can't save yourself.

Today is the first Sunday in Advent. Help is on the way; actually, help has already arrived. We have rescue now and a greater rescue awaits. We pray together again our collect for today. *Stir up your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins saved by Your mighty deliverance; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Rescue was needed at the time of our text. The Babylonians were parked outside the walls of Jerusalem. They had been there before, two other times. They came in 605 BC and 597 BC, and now it's about 587 BC. But they were counting time that way, for them it was the 10th year of the reign of Zedekiah, King of Judah, which was the 18th year of the Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This would be the last visit. At the time of our text the people of Jerusalem are safe inside, but it is not going to end well. There was no one

getting out and no food getting in. Every day was a little more desperate than the one before.

We could say Jeremiah was even safer inside. Even as the people are locked up within the city, Jeremiah is locked up in the court of the guard of the palace of the king (32:2). He was there because he was saying that God was going to give the city into the hand of the king of Babylon (32:3-4). They could fight the Babylonians but they would not succeed. Maybe the people wanted Jeremiah to be more like Isaiah. In his day the Assyrians had surrounded the city and Isaiah had said, “He shall not come into this city or shoot an arrow there.” (Isaiah 37:33) The “he” was the king of Assyria. That was a different time and a different king. Hezekiah reigned over Judah, a righteous king. Zekeiah’s name means “Righteous is the LORD,” but the one bearing the name was not, far from it. All in the city longed for rescue, faithful and unfaithful alike.

Who or what is at our gates? Are you experiencing an existential crisis (a term that has become quite popular of late)? Is your existence threatened. That can happen and does through such things as disease, accidents, or being on the wrong end of a gun. Such crises also come to institutions. Families can be having rough times. The business could be in big trouble. It may not be the best of time for churches and Christian schools. Is the Hun at the gate?

Perhaps we are not in an existential crisis but a circumstantial crisis we would rather just go away. We may find we are under the bottom of a series of unfortunate circumstances. Such events or series of events are real zappers and energy suckers. We may feel that the tumbleweeds are gathering on our porch and who knows when the fire will be kindled.

We could say we are in a cultural crisis. Our times can be discouraging. It's tough when evil is counted as good and good as evil. And it made worse by those who say everything is just fine. There were false prophets in Jeremiah's time doing just this. "They continue to say to those who despise the word of the LORD. 'It shall be well with you' and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'" (23:17) Is rescue needed?

Jeremiah said rescue was on the way. Jeremiah, who so often was the bearer and proclaimer of bad news, brings forth great news even as he is locked up in the king's court. "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land." (32:15) "Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. ³⁸ And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." (32:27-38) "Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ **I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.**" (33:6-8)

Would there be rescue from the Babylonians, no. Yet rescue was coming in the Branch. "In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to sprint up for David, and He shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (vs 15) "This is the name by which *it* will be called (assume the *it* is Jerusalem), "The LORD is our righteousness.'" We have almost the same words in 23:5, 6 and there we read, "This is the name by which *He* will be called, "The LORD is our righteousness."

Who could this be? It is certainly not Zedekiah. As said before his name means, “Righteous is the Lord.” His name had been Mattaniah. He was the uncle of Jehoiachin, but when Nebuchadnezzar made his second visit he carried off Jehoiachin (along with a lot of others) and renamed Matthanah. Was this to show his control? Was this to show disdain for the God of Israel? Actually, it may well have happened as a result of his knowing the Lord God through one Daniel in Babylon. The name of this Branch was more than a declaration of God’s righteousness, no it declares the LORD is our righteousness.

The coming of the Branch is declared and the wait is on, a wait that had already been going on for centuries at the time of these words. The city is taken, the city is destroyed, the temple is burned, and captives are carried away. Then a few decades later exiles would return, and the Temple would be rebuilt. But what about the Branch? Yes, they did return, but they were under the Medes and Persians and then the Greeks. Then they would be free, but it would not last. It would then be the Roman subjection. Where was this rescue; where was this Branch?

Then one day there is voice, a voice crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the Lord.” This proclaimer proclaimed the coming of a greater one, much greater. He comes. He arrives. He teaches and acts in ways no one has ever seen before. Could this be the Christ? Was this the Branch for David? The people are divided. Many in the leadership are united. This one is trouble, bad news, and if not stopped it would mean more trouble, terrible, terrible trouble. This sprout needs to be stopped, cut off, cut down. And they plot to bring about that very thing.

He continues his work. Crowds gather. It seems as though there is no stopping him. Passover approaches. The city is full of pilgrims. In he rides. He’s been to Jerusalem

before but never a reception like this. In he rides in as the shouts ring out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38) Some of the Pharisees object to the shouting. He answers, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” (vs 40-41) Such an entrance, such high hopes. Was the Branch about to take His seat on the throne as the rightful son of David?

But it didn't end well, not the way his disciples had hoped, not at all. He is betrayed. He is handed over. He is condemned. How could this be the Branch? He is nailed to the cross there to wither and dry. How could he rescue? He was the one needed rescue, but none came.

But there is rescue. No, as mentioned, the city of Jerusalem would not be spared from the Babylonians, no repeat of the deliverance from the Assyrians. Zedekiah tried to escape. He is captured. His sons are killed before his eyes. Those eyes are then put out and he is carried away (Jeremiahs 52:11). Jeremiah is spared. He is allowed to stay with those who are left in the land. He had his life spared as God had always promised.

All these events being used to God as He worked through nations and kings to bring about the time when He would bring the Branch to rescue. Yes, the Branch is nailed to the cross, and no, no one rescues. He is mocked. ‘He saved others, but he can't save himself.’ But that was not quite true. He could have saved Himself, but if so, then He would have saved no one. He is the LORD, our righteousness. He always walked in righteousness, totally, despite the temptation to walk elsewhere. And then He becomes a fuel for the fire of God's justice in our place. Now He is raised up, at God's right hand, ruling over all for the sake of His body, the church.

The Apostles finally get it. After the resurrection, after meeting with the Lord over a period of 40 days, seeing His ascension, and then the outpouring of the Spirit on the 50th

day after the resurrection, yes, they get it, and they won't be quiet about it. There is rescue in the Branch.

The Branch has arrived. The Christmas tree can remind us. Maybe we should think of the Christmas tree from a Charlie Brown Christmas of years ago. It didn't look much, but it turned out to be beautiful. "For He grew up before Him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, no beauty that we should desire Him." (Isaiah 53:2). Yet He is the LORD. He is our righteousness.

So was Judah saved and did Jerusalem dwell securely. Well, they would be restored for a time. But there is a much bigger picture here. Those who are in Christ are part of God's Israel. Yes, in Him we are saved and we are secure no matter what or who may be at the gates. Remember we are told by Christ that He will build His church and not even the gates of hell will prevail against it. And one day the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven like a bride all decked out for her husband.

The prayer is answered. We have been rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by God's mighty deliverance. We have been rescued from the power of sin to walk after our Lord. It is not a matter of merely surviving until our Lord returns; it is being His light and His salt in this dark and decaying world in which we live. It is our Lord who establishes our hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father and will until the rearrival of the Branch. For Jesus' sake. Amen