

Waiting for the Right-Wiser!
Jeremiah 33:14-16, Luke 21:25-36

There is no end to bad news in the world these days, is there? There's global bad news, national bad news, local bad news, and personal bad news. But bad news is no new phenomenon. It is as old as humankind. The prophet Jeremiah lived during a time of tremendous bad news and it had a profound and painful impact on him. So great was the impact of bad news on Jeremiah that he is sometimes called the weeping prophet.

Today's text comes from a time of terrible happenings in the history of Judah and the life of Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah 32:1-5, the armies of ancient Babylon were besieging the city of Jerusalem and Jeremiah was a prisoner in King Zedekiah's court. Zedekiah was the King of Judah and he had imprisoned Jeremiah because Jeremiah had foretold both the coming capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians as well as Zedekiah's future capture and imprisonment by them. Zedekiah was not amused by Jeremiah's prophecies. Little wonder then that he imprisoned Jeremiah inside his court.

In addition to these circumstances inside the kingly court of Zedekiah, the situation inside Jerusalem was desperately dire, too. In Jeremiah 32:24, Jeremiah said, "...the siege ramps have been cast up against the city (of Jerusalem) to take it, and the city, faced with sword, famine, and pestilence, has been given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it."

Yes, it was a very dark time for Judah, Jerusalem, and Jeremiah. Nonetheless, as dark as it was, Jeremiah saw a glimmer of hope. Somewhere out there on the dim horizon, a light was shining in the darkness that was then surrounding the people of God. In Jeremiah chapter 33, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time. "Thus says the Lord: In...the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal, there shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord...For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at (the) first, says the Lord." (Jer. 33:10-11)

How would God restore the fortunes of his people under circumstances such as this? That question is answered in our text – Jeremiah 33:14-16. "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. 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. 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."

You see, according to Jeremiah, God would send someone in the lineage of King David to execute justice and righteousness in the land. He would be like a branch springing up on the dead stump of the Davidic dynasty cut down by the Babylonians, springing up to set things right once more. In other words, he would be the Right-Wiser, come to set things right again.

The Jews of Jeremiah's day had to wait a very long time for that promise to be fulfilled. They had to wait half a millennium – more than 500 years. But then, "...a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered...(So) Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger..." (Lk. 2:1, 4-7)

We Christians believe that Jesus was, and is, the promised Right-Wiser. God came in Jesus Christ to set things right in a world gone badly wrong. When we look at the life of Jesus Christ, we see him setting things right on every hand. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He clothed the naked. He raised the dead. He freed those bound by demonic forces – forces they couldn't control. He welcomed strangers. He embraced sinners. He ate with outcasts. He touched the unclean and unclaimed and lifted their lives with love. He challenged those in positions of power – whether sacred or secular – and called them to reorder their lives in the service of others instead of living solely in the service of self. And in him people saw the inbreaking of another kingdom – the very kingdom of God. He gave himself to this work fully, completely, to the last, and to the Cross – and then he rose again to unleash his Spirit in the hearts of his own people so that his work of right-wising might continue through them.

My friends, you and I are among those people. Today, we look back at the work begun in Bethlehem so very long ago and we take inspiration from the gospels that tell us of Jesus' right-wising work in ancient Galilee. We look back, too, at all the right-wising work accomplished by his Spirit through his people in the many ages since that day, and our hearts are strangely warmed. Then we look around and see the right-wising work of Jesus as it's going on still, and we feel ourselves further inspired.

My friends, don't be so discouraged by the bad news tellers on TV. Look around and you will see bright glimmers of hope everywhere, and this is the work of God in Christ! For example, in our own church, The United Methodist Church, our denomination has committed itself to four focused areas of ministry. Those four areas of focus are:

- Improving Global Health
- Ministering with the Poor
- Developing Christian Leaders
- Creating New and Renewed Congregations

Work in each of those areas goes on quietly day by day through a people called Methodists. For example, did you know that "The United Methodist Church has been a key player in fighting diseases such as malaria and AIDS and promoting initiatives that improve well-being. The church is nearing its goal of raising \$75 million to provide education, infrastructure, communication and prevention measures to defeat malaria. In fact, the death rate from malaria in Africa has been cut in half, thanks to international efforts such as (our) denomination's Imagine No Malaria campaign. (And) a new

“Abundant Health” campaign for (our) denomination (will) reach one million children with lifesaving interventions by 2020.”¹

And our church, Mountain View United Methodist Church, animated by the Spirit of Jesus the Right-Wiser, goes about this right-wising work, week in and week out, right here in our own community and around our nation and the world. By the time this year ends, we will have given between \$28,000 and \$30,000 to organizations like Habitat for Humanity, Community Cupboard, Help the Needy, Day Break, Woodland Park Senior Center, the High Chateau fire victims, our local fire stations, Welcome Home Warriors, Community Partnership, UMCOR Disaster Relief, Exodus Road, Compassion International, and Heifer Project, as well as supporting various missionaries and other denominational ministry and mission projects. Add to this the numerous hours that many of you are volunteering in and around our community, and the work our paid staff does on a daily basis, and you can see that we are deeply involved in the ongoing work of right-wising our world.

That said, there remains a lot of wrong in our world today – wrong that still needs righting. A glance at the daily headlines will quickly confirm that fact. And so, we labor on in our right-wising work, and we also wait. We wait for the Right-Wiser – Jesus himself – to come again to complete the work he began in Bethlehem so very long ago. That’s what the season of Advent is all about, by the way. It’s a season of waiting – waiting for Jesus to come again to complete his work and set to right all things that are currently wrong.

We see this call to watchful waiting reflected in the gospel reading assigned to this Sunday as a companion to the reading in Jeremiah. In Luke 21:25-28, Jesus describes the wrong-way world in which we live. It’s a world all out of sorts; a world that most desperately needs righting. “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations...,” he says. “People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken,” he adds. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” In other words, they will see the Right-Wiser returning to set all things to right. “Now when these things begin to take place,” he goes on to say, “stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Yes, when you see these things, stand up! Watch and wait with eager longing! The right-wising of all things is near!

My friends, we begin Advent by remembering how God came in Christ to set things right. We remember, too, how he’s been working by his Spirit and through his people to right things ever since. He’s working in us and through us even now to make things right in our wrong-way world. Remembering this, let’s work and wait and watch. For one day, our redemption will draw near. He will come again to set all things to right at last. For he is our great Right-Wiser – the One worthy of our waiting, our work, our worship, and our praise! So then, let us begin Advent with that ancient cry of the church: Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus! Amen.

¹ <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/four-areas-of-focus-overview>

