

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

"The days are surely coming..." suggests either disaster or **hope**. In Jeremiah 31 and 33, the prophet is offering God's hope after the united kingdom had been divided and both Israel and Judah were basically in ruins. The Babylonians had captured "the best and brightest" and taken these religious and political [well basically the same] leaders from Jerusalem to Babylon where they lived in exile for 70 years [a few generations]. This was not a time of great hope in the eyes of the world. Yet Jeremiah emerges as a prophet to proclaim HOPE: *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. He will execute justice and righteousness in the land. Jeremiah 33.14-16*

Such words of HOPE were also reflected when Jeremiah announced that the days are coming when God will make a new **covenant** with the Hebrew people. Maybe Jeremiah should have announced "in some future year or decade or century" there will be a new covenant and a righteous branch of David who will execute justice and righteousness. Ultimately the **new covenant** and the **righteous branch** arrives with Jesus Christ. So about 700 years after the proclamations of Jeremiah, the people who lived in great hope realized their hope in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

God's time is different than our time. God's patience greater than ours. Many Jews became discouraged while waiting for 700 years. Some of us are becoming impatient with the length of the call process. When we consider that it has been only 15 months since our call committee was formed, we are moving forward. Slowly and deliberately. The good news is that we will not wait 700 years or months until we call a pastor. We are in God's hands and God has a plan for us.

The good news is that Jesus was and is and will be forever the righteous branch and the new covenant. Jesus initiated the new covenant when he told the disciples, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin." WOW- our sins are forgiven! But the price was the execution of an innocent man who was the righteous branch of David. Jesus paid the price for our forgiveness. Forgiveness is free for believers. We will celebrate the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, and again remember the night, when despite the ultimate betrayal, Jesus promised believers a new covenant of freedom in the forgiveness of sins. That folks is Christian Hope.

During this Lenten season, St. Paul and Zion have gathered to explore Christian Hope, that which sets us apart from the rest of the world. I hope you have been able to join us for food, fellowship, discussion and worship. I pray that you will participate in the coming weeks in the Holy Eucharist on Maundy Thursday and the suffering of our savior on Good Friday [7 p.m. at St Paul] and the great Easter feast. God offers us forgiveness and then the miracle of resurrection with the joy of eternal life on Easter. Sacred days are surely coming. I hope you can be with us for the holiest of holy weeks in our church year.

May The Creator who continues to fill all with abundance, Christ who spreads his arms in love and forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit who draws us into God's holy presence abide with you during Lent and always.

Shalom,
Pastor Bev +

