

The Promise

A devotional reflection based on Jeremiah 33:14-16

LIFE ISN'T NORMAL.

One day I asked a group of teenagers to draw a scene or write a story of a perfect day. I imagined they would share pictures and tales of self-gratifying experiences. I was prepared to see images of them receiving extravagant gifts or praise from their peers. I expected to hear them announce hopes in a day were they cured cancer or received an international award.

After several minutes, I asked for a volunteer to share. Jane innocently raised her hand and stood up. Everyone turned to give her their attention and Jane turned her picture around to reveal the image of a tall guy and short girl holding hands.

Being a smart aleck, I asked, "Is your perfect day meeting your husband?" Everyone laughed in unison, except Jane.

Jane gently replied, "No. My perfect day is to meet my father."

Jane went on to tell us the story of never knowing her father. We heard a fragmented story of her mother and father's relationship that had more questions than answers. She talked about being raised by her grandmother and shared some of her relationship with her mother. Then she carried us to moments in her life where she saw a proud father holding the hand of his daughter. She affirmed the love her mother had for her but expressed the hope for a day when she could know the love of her father.

Silence consumed our group. No one knew what to say. It seemed like everyone, except Jane, shared my expectations for this exercise. No one was prepared to hear that something is deeply wrong with the world. It seemed like all of us, except Jane, knew the love of a father as normal. In that moment, we were shocked back into the reality that sin tragically makes our dreams of a perfect day merely a hope for normal.

THE PROMISE OF NORMAL

In the beginning, God created the world normal. More accurately, the Scripture uses the word good. The goodness of God's original design for creation is God's normal, and it was supposed to be common to our experience of life. In short, we were supposed to experience harmony in our relationship with God, self, others, and the world.

All of that has gone terribly wrong because we chose to break the harmony of relationships by denying God. By breaking the one rule we had, we rejected God as God, and sin, which is abnormal to God's creation, became common. We began to experience dissonance in our relationship with God, self, others, and the world.

The people of God in Jeremiah's day were keenly aware of the commonness of sin. It was a part of their government and religious lives. At the time, Jeremiah and the people of God had experienced a series of four evil kings who rejected God and led the people to put their trust in other nations for their protection. Likewise, the religious leaders rejected God and led the people to put their trust in idols as their ultimate hope. Thus sin was common in every part of their life.

In this context, Jeremiah announces, "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah." In a way, God is promising a perfect day when His normal is common again. On that day, God will provide a leader from the family tree of Judah and more specifically from the branch of David. The leader will make acting just and right common again. God also promises to make Jerusalem, the center for the worship of God in those days, a safe place. Righteousness will become a common characteristic for those who worship God. In all of this, God is promising them a day when God is once again treated as God and the harmony of relationships is restored.

A LIFE OF PROMISE

This Advent season we begin with the promise of God to provide a righteous one who will come from the branch of David. Though we are tempted to jump to a celebration of how God has already fulfilled this promise, we should wait. We should stay in Jeremiah's prophecy and

with the people of God in those days in order to hear the gift of God's promises.

The people of God didn't know when or how these promises would be fulfilled. They still had to endure political, religious, and economic uncertainty in their day. They had to face the reality that sin was still common to their daily life at the market, in the temple, and with their family. Jeremiah announces these promises to God's people under the oppression of sin as an invitation. They are an invitation to a life of promise.

We're invited this Advent season to hear the promises of God and to live as though God's perfect day is today. This is not a naive approach to life where we ignore the commonness of sin. This is a hope-filled engagement with life where we focus on the fact that our God is God of all and we can trust His promise to live just and righteous lives in the here and now. Therefore, our preparation for the celebration of Christ begins with the embrace of the life of promise God extends to us. It begins by embracing God's perfect day as merely the normal day God originally planned for everyone to experience. It begins with the full commitment to obey His leading. It begins with hoping in the day when we will be able to meet our Heavenly Father and "know him directly just as he knows us" (1 Corinthians 13:12b, *The Message*).

SUNDAY ★ Anticipate the Promise

DAILY PSALM

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, my soul. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. (Psalm 146:1, 6)

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL • Hang the Jesse Tree Ornament – Genesis 1:26-2:4

CREATION

God said, “Let’s make humans in our own image. They’ll be responsible to take care of all we created.” And God did just that.

Humans, male and female, were a part of God’s plan for creation. All of us were given a unique role among all the creatures that God created. Our role was to represent God to all creation. Our passage talks about that role as being created in the image of God. In other words, we were created to reflect God’s character and action in how we lived.

Being a representative of God to all creation was imagined to be like the role of the priest in ancient times. The role of the priest is to extend God’s care and blessing to all people. They are to lead people to follow God faithfully. This is similar to the role God had in mind for all humans. We were supposed to reflect God’s care and blessing for all in our actions and words. All humans were intended to faithfully follow God and so care for each other and all creation. In short, all of us are to be priests in God’s grand temple, creation.

Jesus, the second Adam and great High Priest, is the fulfillment of humanity’s role. Jesus reflects God’s care and blessing for all and shows what it means to be a priest. By healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing those enslaved by demons, and forgiving sins, Jesus shows us what it means to be human as God intended from the beginning.



FOR CHILDREN

In the beginning, there was nothing. Then God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light. Then God put water in the sea and clouds in the sky. Next He made land. After that He put the sun, moon and stars in place. He filled the sea and sky. Then He filled the land with all kinds of animals and made humans like you and me. This was the beginning of Jesus’ family. Finally, God looked at all He made and said, “This is good!” So He stopped creating, rested and enjoyed everything He made.

- What do you like to do outside?
- How are we different from other things God created?
- I wonder how God wants us to care for His creation.

PRAAYER

God of creation may you lead us in the way of Jesus to care for your creation and bless others in your name as witnesses of your Advent.