

Jeremiah 33:14-16
"The Lord is our Righteousness"
First Sunday in Advent

December 2, 2018
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Ambrose of Milan]

A long time ago, a man had plans to become a lawyer, but God had other plans for this man.

This man was quite popular. In fact, he was elected governor without even campaigning.

Then after two years of being governor – and out of the blue – this man was named the new bishop.

Oddly enough, this man was still a catechumen. He wasn't even confirmed in the Christian faith!

He didn't know the basics of theology! Even more odd, this man was not even baptized!

Yet, the people wanted him to be their bishop.

Then within a week of his election, he was baptized, ordained and made bishop.

As bishop, this man told the people to be patient with him, because he was learning the faith while he was also required to teach the faith.

This man who wanted to be a lawyer, who was so popular with his people, who was elected governor and bishop to his shock was Ambrose of Milan.

You may have heard of him.

As bishop of Milan, Ambrose did not let his power and his influence corrupt him. Instead, he committed himself to God's Word and studied God's Word faithfully. In time, Ambrose became a strong teacher of the Christian faith.

In fact, this coming Friday, December 7th, is the date the Christian Church recognizes Ambrose for his contribution to the Church.

So, what was Ambrose of Milan known for?

Well, Ambrose was known as the first Latin Doctor of the Church, a theologian of highest rank. The other Latin Doctors were Augustine, Jerome and Gregory the Great. So, this is small company.

He received this honor, because as there was much strife in the Church in the fourth century, he remained ever faithful to God's Word.

And, you would think that being born after the Council of Nicaea – for which we received the Nicene Creed – that those false teachers that Nicaea condemned would just go away, but instead they were just as loud as ever.

These false teachers were saying that Jesus wasn't fully God, that Jesus was created.

So, just as these false teachers taught loudly, Ambrose taught God's truth louder.

Ambrose was a faithful bishop and servant of Jesus Christ, who taught and preached God's truth, even when God's truth was unpopular. He was also known for his teaching through music.

In fact, one of the hymns he wrote was what we just sang together: "*Savior of the Nations, Come.*"

In this hymn, Ambrose proclaims the truth of Christ: that Jesus is fully God and fully man and He came to make us righteous in God's sight.

[The Messiah Foretold]

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord..." (Jeremiah 33:14a). This is how the prophet Jeremiah begins our Old Testament text this morning.

Usually, when we read “*Behold, the days are coming*” in Scripture, this is so often associated with judgement and punishment, but Jeremiah uses this phrase to introduce good news.

This good news is first presented in terms of a promise God vows to keep when He says: “***I will fulfill the promise***” (Jeremiah 33:14b).

Jeremiah writes: “***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... And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness’***” (Jeremiah 33:15, 16b).

Here, Jeremiah is foretelling a big surprise for us.

This “righteous Branch” – this coming Messiah – will not only “***execute justice and righteousness in the land,***” but He will be called “***the Lord is our righteousness.***”

Jeremiah is, of course, foretelling the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, who is of the house and lineage of King David. However, unlike David, Jesus would reign forever.

But, Jesus was not just an ordinary man as we had sung in the fourth stanza of Ambrose’s hymn:

“Then stepped forth the Lord of all
From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man,
His heroic course began.” *Savior of the Nations, Come*
(LSB 332, stanza 4)

Jesus of Nazareth is in fact true God and true Man. He is the only-begotten Son of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

[Our Righteousness]

Now, the plan of the Triune God for Christ’s first Advent was not to lord over us that Jesus is God in the flesh and our eternal King. Instead, God’s plan was to make us righteous with God the Father.

Ambrose refers to this in his hymn:

“For You are the Father’s Son Who in flesh the victory won. By Your mighty power make whole All our ills of flesh and soul.” *Savior of the Nations, Come* (LSB 332, stanza 6)

You see, without Jesus we, poor sinners are doomed. We are doomed to our ills. We are doomed to our sin against God.

But, Jeremiah tells us that God’s people will be saved, because “*The Lord is our righteousness*” (Jeremiah 33:16b).

Without our Lord Jesus Christ, we could never become righteous. We could try, but we would always fall short, because of our sin against God. We tend to always put our eyes toward what we want, rather than God’s desire for us.

But by grace through faith in Christ alone, we are righteous before God the Father. Our sins are wiped away. Our sins are wiped clean. We are reconciled with God the Father and we are accepted as children of God, because of Christ’s obedience.

So, through Christ alone, we are absolved – we are clean – from all our unrighteousness.

We are given Christ’s righteousness through His death, resurrection and ascension.

Through Christ, we are pronounced innocent from all our sins, so we do *not* receive the judgement of damnation that we deserve.

We are pronounced righteous through Christ alone and without any merit of our own.

Because of Christ, God the Father sees us wearing the gold medal, given the blue ribbon. We become God the Father’s prized possession.

So now, we share in Christ’s victory over sin, death and hell, because we are covered in Christ’s cloak of righteousness that He gave to us at our baptism.

Since the Lord is our righteousness, our Lord Jesus Christ’s name becomes our name. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

God declares us sinners righteous because Christ's righteousness has been given to us. This declaration is our entry into eternal life.

So, all God the Father sees in us is His Son, Jesus Christ. But, this isn't a free pass into heaven, but a promise – a guarantee – to heaven if we remain obedient to God's Word and repent of our sins.

It is only through Christ's power that we are made whole and all our ills vanish.

[Promises]

Now, we may not always think of ourselves as righteous, as perfect. Especially, since we struggle just keeping promises.

We promise to do something and we often fail to make do on that promise.

We promise to obey God and His Commandments, but we often think of our own sinful desires ahead of God. Instead, we put our faith and trust into false idols of money, possessions, entertainment and sport.

Among our relationship with our neighbor – our family and friends – we often fail on our promises to each other.

But, even as we break our promises, the Triune God never breaks His promises.

He has promised us His righteousness. He has promised us salvation.

So, when we break our promises to God, God is always there to offer us forgiveness when we come to Him in repentance.

Through our baptism and our loyalty to Jesus, God the Father sees us as He sees His own Son. He sees us as righteous before Him.

Elsewhere in our hymn, Ambrose tells us how we became righteous:

“God the Father was His source, Back to God He ran His course. Into hell His road went down, Back then to His throne and crown.” *Savior of the Nations, Come* (LSB 332, stanza 5)

Jesus covered us all in His righteousness when He destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil when He died upon that cross. Through His death, He conquered hell, itself.

Then He rose from the dead to prove that His sacrifice was accepted by God the Father.

Then through His death and resurrection, we are now ***“blameless in holiness before our God and Father”*** (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

Indeed, we are blameless in holiness, because of Jesus’ Word and deeds. We are blameless in holiness, because of the Holy Spirit’s work in us through God’s Word and Sacrament.

We are blameless, forgiven and saved, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness.

So, let us rejoice in what Christ has given us by grace through faith – His righteousness – and let us look forward to His Second Advent when He will come again in glory!

Savior of the Nations, Come. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠