

“Hope Built on the Promise”

Jeremiah 33: 14-16

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

What promises do you choose to live by? What are the promises you live by in your life? What are the promises you hold on to? There are many people who are having a hard time in life because they put their hope in promises which are deceptive and too often focused on the self. At this time of year, it is good to ask the question: Do loads of presents fulfill the promise of a good Christmas?

In terms of one's journey of 'success' in life, we do follow certain promises. Success does promise some financial freedom and that is helpful. Success is important as well because it helps to build confidence, but success in worldly terms is not enough. One's identity is not to be based on one's success or not, but on the promises of God – that is sustaining. What promises are you putting your hope into?

¹⁴ 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 (verse 14, 15).” This piece of scripture in Jeremiah was written by the prophet when things were not going well for his people. About 600 years before Jesus was born, the people of Israel were on the edge of being taken out of their Promised Land because for several generations they had strayed away from God and were not relying on the promise-giver. They were distracted by other sorts of promises. Everything around them which had given them meaning and identity, all looked like it would be destroyed. And at that moment, Jeremiah states that one will rise up – a Messiah – within the line of David, who will restore Jerusalem to the way of justice and righteousness. This promise of the Messiah gave the people hope! The scripture states that this messiah - he will be our righteousness!

Hope is built on a promise. Being optimistic and hopeful are often words described in the same sentence. Optimism is the tendency to take a favourable view of things. For an optimistic person the glass is 'half full' as it were. For a pessimistic person, the glass is 'half empty'. I believe that Hope is a deeper concept than optimism where hope is built on a promise. Hope is living with the expectation that the promise will become reality and living in grateful enthusiasm looking forward to that promise. In a promise, one looks forward. We are at the start of Advent. We begin with hope as we move towards the birth of the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

“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 (verse 16).”

Already in the Old Testament among the Israelites God had set things right for us. It is as good as done because God is faithful. Hear the words of Paul in Corinthians, *“God is ever true to His promises, and it was by Him that you were, one and all, called into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).”*

You have a promise! About 25 years ago, Jackie and I were friends with a couple who were a couple of decades older than us. The husband had terminal cancer and was close to his death. In such comforting words, his wife said to him regularly, “You have a promise.” These are words which come to all of us as we read our scripture today, we worship, and we look forward to the coming of our Lord.

Put your hope in the right place. “Professional golfer Paul Azinger was doing very well in his career having won the PGA championship and had won several tournaments. Then at the age of 33 he was diagnosed with cancer. The feeling came over him that he could die. Everything he had accomplished suddenly became meaningless to him. All he wanted to do at that point was live.

As he was reflecting, he remembered what Larry Moody, who taught a Bible study on the tour, had said to him. "Zinger, we're not in the land of the living going to the land of the dying. We're in the land of the dying trying to get to the land of the living." Zinger realized that the successes in golf only gave him temporary happiness. He said the only way to find true lasting contentment is in a relationship with Christ. Certainly Azinger had problems in life like everyone else, but he had discovered that he had a promise in Christ - and that was revealed to be his true source of joy!

Have you put your hope in all the wrong places? If you have not put your hope in Jesus, I invite you now to put your hope in him. There are some of us as well who know the promises of God but get distracted by the promises of the season, and we experience the stress that goes along with that. This advent season please remember the promise of God's eternal love in the Christ Child who saves you today and forever. We can look forward in hope to our final destination in Christ who is faithful and true to his promises. Be aware of the distracting promises out there. Remember - you have a promise! Amen.