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“The Young and the Restless”

Text: Jeremiah 1:1-19; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 1:67-79

Advent is a season of repentance, and Jeremiah is a preacher of repentance. He was sent by God at a particularly low point in Judah’s history. The people of Judah had watched the fall of their sister, Israel, because of her unfaithfulness to the Lord, but did not learn from that. In fact, as Jeremiah would preach, they became even worse, piling sin upon sin and iniquity upon iniquity. They could not get their fill of false gods, and it got so bad that Jeremiah compared Judah to “a she-camel in heat,” chasing after false gods to satisfy her lusts.

To such a people God sends Jeremiah. It is a sign of His love and faithfulness. Though Judah be unfaithful, the Lord will not give up on them or divorce them. He will call them back, and He puts His Word into Jeremiah’s mouth to do so. It will not be easy, not will it be pleasant. Jeremiah is to **pluck up and break down, to destroy and overthrow** - for this must come first. The people must be first be humbled and driven to repentance, before God can, through Jeremiah, **build and plant** them again.

And so it is with you and me today. Though it is easy to sit here tonight and ridicule the people of Judah for their unfaithfulness and stupidity in rejecting and resisting their God, who had done so much for them . . . the season of Advent calls us to reflect on just how we might be the same. We don’t like to think we have other gods, false gods, but we do. The First Commandment tells us to have no other gods, which means to fear, love, and trust in the one true God above all else. But in truth, there is much that we fear, love, and trust more than God. We fear the future, we love our stuff, we trust what we can see more than what we cannot see. And that’s just to name a few. And though we have seen the sadness and misery of those who reject the Lord, we too have not learned from this, have we? Perhaps it has even made us pridefully worse.

And so we must be **plucked up and broken down**, too. We must be *driven* to repentance, for to no one does this come naturally. And then we can be **built up and planted** in the forgiveness and new life of the Lord. For the Lord is loving and faithful, not wishing any to be lost. He will not discard you or give up on you. He comes with His strong Word, to save you.

And to help Jeremiah understand that, God next gives him two visions: **the almond**

**branch** and **the pot of boiling water**. The almond tree is special because it is one of the first trees to bloom in Israel. While it is still cold and wintery, it puts out its blossoms - a sign that Spring is near. And this, God says, is a picture of His Word, which He is watching over to perform it. And so, Jeremiah, when things look bad, when the winter of sin seems to go on and on, when love remains cold and it seems as if all your preaching is coming to nothing, the Word of God will bloom. God's Word will not return empty. Just because you can't see it working doesn't mean that it's not working. God's Word will bring forth life, just as at the beginning of creation, when God spoke and it was so.

Of course, the almond branch also reminds us of another tree which, we could say, bloomed in the winter of our sin - and that was the tree of the cross. Things looked bad then, too. But the Word of God made flesh would not return empty. For after Jesus was destroyed and planted in the ground came the springtime of the resurrection. And so from that tree now comes our life. Life, literally, from the dead! Life made right with God with our sins and unfaithfulness forgiveness. That is the Word that God would unfailingly perform. The promise He made for all people of all time.

The second vision Jeremiah received was of a boiling pot, which represented the disaster coming upon the people from the north. They would be defeated in war. But that's not all God is saying here - for what is hot, or boiling, water used for? It cleanses. With this discipline and defeat, God was washing the land and His people of their false gods, to cleanse them. It was a harsh judgment, to be sure! But a good one. A loving one. One that would not simply let His people go their own way, but loved them enough to bring them back.

You, too, have been washed by your Lord. We heard of that tonight in the words of Paul to Titus:

***But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, - or, when Jesus came - he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, - because we have been unfaithful! - but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.***

The water that now washes us is no longer boiling for that water, that judgment, was poured out upon Jesus on the cross, in our place. The water that is now poured out upon us, that washes us, the water of Holy Baptism, is now a washing of regeneration and renewal; a washing of the Holy Spirit. That we may be His people. To cleanse us of all our sins and false gods. To bring us to our Lord.

For that, again, is what our Lord desires: that *all* people be *His* people, by grace through faith. And so He sent Jeremiah. And so He sent John the Baptist - to be a prophet like Jeremiah and call the people to repentance, and also to baptize. And so He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that, as we heard tonight from Zechariah, John's father: ***that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve [our Lord] without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.***

And so Jeremiah is very much an Advent prophet, for he preaches our Lord's coming; His coming to cleanse and save. Jeremiah, at first, thought himself not up to the task, for he said: ***I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.*** But as he would learn, the words he would speak were not his own, but the Lord's. And they would be the words of a *restless* God - a God who would not rest until His Word and promises were fulfilled.

And that is true for you and I as well. The season of Advent calls us to remember the fulfillment of God's promises in sending His Son as our Saviour, but it also calls us to remember that our Lord is still restless, still working, and still fulfilling His promises now. Calling sinners to repentance and giving the gift of His forgiveness and life, until the fulness of time will come with our Saviour's *second* Advent, at the end of time.

Until that time,  
The Lord is watching over His Word, to perform it.  
I am with you, to deliver you, declares the Lord.  
Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.