

I AM OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

*In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness."*<sup>1</sup>

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Happy New Year! It is time again to preach of the coming of the Christ as the One who "Saves Now!" This is not the week for the message of Christmas cheer, for it is the time of waiting and watching that anticipate the incarnation of God in our flesh. It is the message of Palm Sunday's cheers that turned to Good Friday's jeers. Another year of proclaiming Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of your sins marches upon us with the prophecy and fulfillment of the triumphal entry of Jesus - to die for your sins. We preachers know that this is not what most church goers want this time of year. Centuries ago, Luther reflected what true evangelical pastors still hear,

*Huh, if all you can do is preach about Christ and faith, I'm fed up with that already, I've heard it all before."*<sup>2</sup>

(The desire to hear of the Law, whether by stories or good moral examples, has not fallen from our hearers. This is so sad, for we have had the Gospel with free course for hundreds of years). Yet, it is the Word of God that must be used to prepare His people for the true reason that Jesus was born - to die as the One truly right with God that He might give you reason for this season's emphasis on godly hope, peace, joy and love.

Our text reminds us of this, when we hear,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 23:6

<sup>2</sup> Klug, et all. Volume 5, p. 35, Luther's third sermon for Advent I.

*In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness."*<sup>3</sup>

A New Year of the Church begins today. It is being heralded among us with texts that show up in our calendar three times. This theme shows up approximately every 19 Sundays each year. That puts it solidly in both halves of the Church Year – the Life of Christ Incarnate, and the Life of Christ in the Church – and it serves as a bridge between those two emphases in Holy Week. To those who are not used to the Lord's life being reflected in the year of the Church, hearing today's readings may seem out of place. Surely, they may reason, such texts, especially that Gospel, belong just before Easter!

Such repetition is no mistake. The men God used to assemble the readings of the Church certainly desired to place before the faithful the manner in which the King of Kings would enter into glory. These texts, and their placement at the beginning of the New Year, display the Righteous One as humble and lowly, yet fulfilling all prophecy. He did so to call by faith the ones God has named His own and to die at the hands of those who reject Him. The Church's prophecy for this week begins:

*Behold, days will come, says YHWH, when I will raise up to David (a) Righteous Branch, (a) King, and He will reign wisely and do righteousness and justice in (the) land.*<sup>4</sup>

There you heard a promise spoken centuries ago to the people of God who were scattered, and would see their kingdoms fall. These words follow on the prophet's revelation that such destruction and dispersion would come upon them on account of their shepherds – kings and priests – who had failed to do right and justice according to

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<sup>3</sup> *Jeremiah 23:6*

the Word of God. It is a promise that He would return to the faithful remnant of those who would be driven from the Presence of God. In those days, the Word declares, He would again rule in their midst with His full wisdom, doing all things well.

We know, by faith, that the Righteous Branch of David's reign is marked with godly knowledge, discernment and justice. The form of the Hebrew in this first sentence, doubles a play on the Word, "King," as in "kingly King." This doubling intensifies the meaning of the title. There would be, in all history, no King as kingly as this coming One. His rule is described as being in perfect harmony with God. Further, this Righteous Branch (think of family tree) will *do righteousness and justice*. That is, He will, in Himself, be endowed with the full righteousness of God. As One possessing such, He will impart to His people perfect and complete rightness with YHWH. His justice will be like no other, not even of that of His ancestor, King David, for this Branch will not sin!

The text continues:

*In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness."<sup>5</sup>*

The Promise of God is that, in the days of the Son of David, the One who is perfectly right with God for His people, all of Israel will be saved. Judah and Israel, the names that represent the fullness of the twelve tribes of the Old Covenant, will find, in this Right One, salvation and safety. Those who had been scattered, on account of the sins of their leaders, in which they themselves participated, would be united in this

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<sup>4</sup> *Jeremiah 23:5*

<sup>5</sup> *Jeremiah 23:6*

Coming One. There is prophetic revelatory language being employed here. It speaks of a uniting of the faithful by the One in Whom they have faith.

What a wonderful promise is being delivered. How long then, did the people who believed in this promise, and those that came before it, have to wait before God brought it to pass?

In terms of actual recorded history, the answer is, hundreds of years. The Kingdom of Israel fell in 722 BC. The Kingdom of Judah was destroyed in 586 BC. The Lord our Righteousness brought His promise to completion on Good Friday, AD 33. You do the math! (It should be no surprise that we who recall today Christ's first Advent, have waited centuries for His final Advent. God is patient, and delays that some - your neighbors, your family - might be joined in the faith to the Coming One)!

With these words, *His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness,"* the Church of the New Israel, founded upon Jesus' faith, notes the attributes of the Righteous Branch of David. For the ancients, there is a lot of meaning in a name. In particular, the Names of God, by which He has revealed Himself to humans, describe Him to us in ways we can understand. The specific name in this text is used to inform those who will hear, you, we pray, that YHWH, which can mean, "I AM," or "I Who cause to be," is the One Who is just and right - legal terms to be sure - for us. Therefore, we may declare this passage to say, *His Name by which He will be called is, "I, Who cause to be, Am 'our Righteousness.'"*

The Church of Old Israel - at least some of her commentators desiring to deny the divinity of King David's greater son - translated the Word of God just read like this,

*This is the name whereby Javeh will call him: Our Righteousness!*<sup>6</sup>

Could you discern the difference?

If the name of the promised Son of David is given to Him *by God* as "Our Righteousness," it is simply a title for a man. Yes, it is an honorable title. But it is one that God might have bestowed on any of David's faithful descendants. For example, the name Zedekiah takes on that meaning. (Some of us remember that there was such a King of the Old Covenant so named).

If, however, the Name is as it is translated from its context, with good textual support, "*YHWH our Righteousness*," it means He is God. The *Righteous Branch* is God! The Name of the Lord is thus attached to the Son of David. That indicates that He is God, the One Who makes us right with God. With that understanding, the confessions of the evangelical Church, to which this congregation and her pastors subscribe without reservation, state:

*We poor sinners are justified before God and saved solely by faith in Christ, so that Christ alone is our righteousness. He is truly God and man since in him the divine and human natures are personally united to one another...*<sup>7</sup>

That is what the world, even those who would herald Jesus as an earthly Messiah, a conquering king, would not believe. Our confession is true. I pray that it is yours, for it is biblical. Return to the prophecy of Jeremiah:

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<sup>6</sup> *KD*, p. 218.

*Therefore, behold, days come, says YHWH, when they will not say, "(as) the YHWH lives, which brought up the sons of Israel from land of Egypt..." but,  
"(As) YHWH lives, Who caused to bring up and Who caused to lead the seed of the house of Israel from (the) northland and from all the lands which I had caused to drive them;" (the) same shall return into all their land.*<sup>8</sup>

That takes us back to the earlier pastoral lament. That is, people **in the Church** want the first type of remembrance – the Law – under which people die, even though they think it is the Gospel. It is the prayer of faithful shepherds that the desire of those whom the LORD has brought back will turn from a remembrance of the Exodus under the leadership of Moses the Lawgiver. Now, when this prophecy is declared as fulfilled, the ones who have been saved will declare that the descendants of the people of God by faith will be returned from dispersion on account of sin, and will dwell with the LORD. The emphasis is shifted from the salvation that came through 40 years of wilderness wandering into death, to the Salvation that comes in the "I AM our Righteousness" who came to die for you.

The emphasis at the beginning of this New Year is a call to return to the LORD in His saving Word and Presence. Yes, the tried but not trite phrase, "return to your baptism every day" is in this call. Find the Lord as He has revealed Himself – humbly entering the midst of His people to "Save Now" by dying naked, alone, humiliated and apparently defeated by the enemies of the Good News of the Son of David.

That is why the more traditional, more ancient colors for Advent are violet, violet, rose and violet. As the Church, you look forward to the coming of our Lord, and in that

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<sup>7</sup> Book of Concord, 472.1

there is joy. However, if it were not for Adam's sin, and our own sins, God would not have to humble Himself so. If not for us, the triumphal Advent proclaimed in today's Gospel might have been His final Advent. He could have entered in victory, riding a mighty steed, having no enemies to conquer, on that day long ago.

Therefore, for the Christian, joy is found not only in gladness, but also lies behind the sorrow and shame we experience on account of our sins that brought God into our flesh to die for us to make us right with the Father. That is because we know that His sacrifice, His death, was for us. For that reason, the Advent purple adorns the church for three of four weeks. We, in the helpful traditions of the church catholic, remember that we are with the believers who waited those hundreds of years for

*His days, [when] Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness."<sup>9</sup>*

### The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent I (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 21:1-9

November 30, 2008

*Pastor Michael H. Merhouse*

### SOLI DEO GLORIA

#### Jeremiah 23:5-8

הַנְּהַי יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְתִקְמַתִּי לְדָוִד צִמַח צְדִיק וּמִלֹּד מִלֹּד וְהִשְׁכִּיל וַעֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט וַיְצַדֵּק בְּאֶרֶץ׃ 5  
בְּיָמָיו תִּוָּשַׁע יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכַּן לְבֶטֶח וְזֶה־שְׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָאוּ יְהוָהוּ צְדִקְנוֹ׃ 6  
לְכֵן הִנֵּה־יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְלֹא־יֵאמְרוּ עוֹד חַי־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם׃ 7  
כִּי אִם־חַי־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלָה וְאֲשֶׁר הֵבִיא אֶת־זֶרַע בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ צְפוֹנָה וּמִכָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִדְחִיתִים שָׁם וַיָּשְׁבוּ 8  
עַל־אֲדָמָתָם׃<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Jeremiah 23:7-8

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 23:6

<sup>5</sup>Ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται, λέγει κύριος, καὶ ἀναστήσω τῷ Δαυιδ ἀνατολὴν δικαίαν, καὶ βασιλεύσει βασιλεὺς καὶ συνήσει καὶ ποιήσει κρίμα καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. <sup>6</sup>ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις αὐτοῦ σωθήσεται Ἰουδας, καὶ Ἰσραὴλ κατασκηνώσει πεποιθώς, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, ὃ καλέσει αὐτὸν κύριος Ἰωσεδεκ. (Verses 7&8 are placed at the end of the chapter in the LXX). <sup>7</sup>Διὰ τοῦτο ἰδοὺ ἡμέραι ἔρχονται, λέγει κύριος, καὶ οὐκ ἐροῦσιν ἔτι Ζῆ κύριος ὃς ἀνήγαγεν τὸν οἶκον Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, <sup>8</sup>ἀλλὰ Ζῆ κύριος ὃς συνήγαγεν ἅπαν τὸ σπέρμα Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ γῆς βορρᾶ καὶ ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν χωρῶν, οὐ ἐξῶσεν αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖ, καὶ ἀπεκατέστησεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν αὐτῶν.<sup>11</sup>

## **TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:**

*Behold, days will come, says YHWH, when I will raise up to David (a) Righteous Branch, (a) King, and He will reign wisely and do righteousness and justice in (the) land.<sup>12</sup>*

*In His days, Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safe, and His Name by which He will be called is, "YHWH our Righteousness."<sup>13</sup>*

*Therefore, behold, days come, says YHWH, when they will not say, "(as) the YHWH lives, which brought up the sons of Israel from land of Egypt..."<sup>14</sup>*

*But, "(as) YHWH lives, which caused to bring up and which caused to lead the seed of the house of Israel from (the) land towards midnight and from all the lands which I had caused to drive them;" (the) same shall return into all their land.<sup>15</sup>*

## **NOTES**

### **Jeremiah 23:6, Book of Concord, 472.1**

It is the unanimous confession of our churches according to the Word of God and the content of the Augsburg Confession that we poor sinners are justified before God and saved solely by faith in Christ, so that Christ alone is our righteousness. He is truly God and man since in him the divine and human natures are personally united to one another (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 5:21). Because of the foregoing a question has arisen, According to which nature is Christ our righteousness? Two false and mutually contradictory teachings have invaded some churches.

<sup>2</sup> One party has held that Christ is our righteousness only according to his Godhead. When he dwells in us by faith, over against this indwelling Godhead, the sins of all men are esteemed like a drop of water over against the immense ocean. Others, however, held that Christ is our righteousness before God only according to the human nature.

### **Jeremiah 23:6, Luther's Works, Vol. 35**

Whoever reads this Bible should also know that I have been careful to write the name of God which the Jews call "Tetragrammaton"<sup>27</sup> in capital letters thus, LORD [HERR],

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<sup>10</sup>*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : With Westminster Hebrew Morphology.* 1996, c1925; morphology c1991 (electronic ed.) . German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary: Stuttgart; Glenside PA

<sup>11</sup>*Septuaginta : With morphology.* 1996, c1979 . Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart

<sup>12</sup> *Jeremiah 23:5*

<sup>13</sup> *Jeremiah 23:6*

<sup>14</sup> *Jeremiah 23:7*

<sup>15</sup> *Jeremiah 23:8*

and the other name which they call *Adonai*<sup>28</sup> only half in capital letters thus, LOrd [*HErr*].<sup>29</sup> For among all the names of God, these two alone are applied in the Scriptures to the real, true God; while the others are often ascribed to angels and saints. I have done this in order that readers can thereby draw the strong conclusion that Christ is true God. For Jeremiah 23[:6] calls him LORD, saying, "He will be called: 'The LORD, our righteousness.'" The same thing is to be found in other passages. Herewith I commend all my readers to Christ and ask that they help me get from God the power to carry this work through to a profitable end. For I freely admit that I have undertaken too much, especially in trying to put the Old Testament into German.<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew language, sad to say, has gone down so far that even the Jews know little enough about it, and their glosses and interpretations (which I have tested<sup>31</sup>) are not to be relied upon. I think that if the Bible is to come up again, we Christians are the ones who must do the work, for we have the understanding of Christ without which even the knowledge of the language is nothing. Because they were without it, the translators of old, even Jerome,<sup>32</sup> made mistakes in many passages. Though I cannot boast of having achieved perfection, nevertheless, I venture to say that this German Bible is clearer and more accurate at many points than the Latin. So it is true that if the printers do not, as usual, spoil it with their carelessness, the German language certainly has here a better Bible than the Latin language – and the readers will bear me out in this.<sup>16</sup>

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27 Tetragrammaton, literally "four letters," is the technical term for the four-consonant Hebrew word for the name God, which is now commonly thought to be represented in English by the word "Yahweh." When the Hebrews came to this name in speaking or reading they avoided uttering it because of its sacred character, pronouncing instead the word Adonai (Lord) unless (as at Gen. 15:2) it immediately followed the word "Adonai" in the text, in which case "Elohim" (God) was read. In written Hebrew texts the vowel-points of Adonai were given to the consonants of the Tetragrammaton with the resultant rendering in English, "Jehovah."

28 Adonai literally means "my lord," but by usage it was in effect a proper name.

29 While the Hebrew *YHWH* always had reference to God alone, *ADN* could mean either the divine Lord, or a lord or ruler who was not divine. Luther distinguished clearly between the two words by rendering *HERR* for *YHWH* and either *HErr* or *herr* for *ADN* (cf. LW 12, 99-101 and LW 13, 230). The distinction between the divine and human within *ADN*, however, was not consistently maintained in translation by the use of *HErr* and *herr* (cf. WA, DB 6, 538-539, note on Matt. 1:20). Cf. Luther's *HERR-HERR* in Jer. 23:5-6 with the RSV LORD-LORD, Luther's *HERR-herr* in Gen. 24:12 with the RSV LORD-master, and Luther's *HERR-HErr* in Ps. 110:1 (1545 version only, the earlier versions being both *HERR-HERR* and *HERR-herr*, WA, DB 10<sup>I</sup>, 476-477) with the RSV LORD-lord. In Luther's Matt. 22:44 rendering of the first "Lord" of the Psalm quotation he went from *Gott* in 1522 through *Herr* and *HErr* to *HERR* in 1539 and later editions (WA, DB 6, 100, note). See Gen. 15:2, 8 where Luther translates *ADN YHWH* as *HErr HERR* (WA, DB 8, 73). Cf. also WA, DB 10<sup>II</sup>, xxiii, n. 26.

30 Cf. Luther's statement, "It was necessary for me to undertake the translation of the Bible, otherwise I would have died under the mistaken impression that I was a learned man." WA 10<sup>II</sup>, 60, ll. 13-15; cf. also WA, Br 2, 423, ll. 48-50.

31 Cf. Luther's *Defense of the Translation of the Psalms*, in this volume, pp. 209-223.

32 Cf. p. 117, n. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1960. Vol. 35: *Luther's works, vol. 35 : Word and Sacrament I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia