

**Advent Worship Series**  
**Sermon Title: “The Day is Coming”**

**29 November 2015: Advent 1**  
FUMC—Arlington, TX 76011  
Preaching Text: Jeremiah 33:14-16

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“Conscience is, in most men, an anticipation of the opinion of others”  
— (Sir Henry Taylor).

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There are no two ways about it: Jeremiah was an “odd duck.” Earlier in his prophecy, Jeremiah buys back his ancestral property just when things looked as bleak as they could for Jerusalem. The Babylonians draw near to ruin Jerusalem . . . and Jeremiah calls his real estate agent. People then and now simply scratch their heads at such behavior. We wonder about Jeremiah. Yet, here is a prophet for whom the sketch, often invoked, never surpassed, comes into play: “prophets afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” Jeremiah certainly afflicted and lesson is proof:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. [22] For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. [23] But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.” [24] Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but, in the stubbornness of their evil will, they walked in their own counsels, and looked backward rather than forward. [25] From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; [26] yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks. They did worse than their ancestors did.

[27] So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. [28] You shall say to them: This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips. . . For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the Lord; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it . . .

The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. [34] And I will bring to an end the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of the bride and bridegroom in the cities of Judah and in

the streets of Jerusalem; for the land shall become a waste (Jer 7:21-28, 30, 33-34).

There are many similar passages, but you get the idea. Jeremiah denounces his lost people. This betrayal accounts for why Israel faced bleak prospects. They had no one to blame but themselves. Worse yet, it is too late for them to adjust their course. They now face a judgment they have called down by forsaking God's covenant.

Surely, we too find ourselves in the valley of judgment. Our unwise choices haunt us. At times people invoke the phrase "Chickens coming home to roost." This phrase suggests judgment upon people's choices. Each of us has our "chickens come home to roost" moments. Our decisions create consequences and "chickens coming home to roost" reminds us of this. Perhaps at the end of the month our money runs out before our bills. Maybe it is when we have health issues and we think like Mickey Mantle once reportedly remarked to his physician: "Doc, if I'd known I was going to live this long, then I'd taken better care of myself." Students often sit in a final exam sheet wondering if studying some might have helped.

Malcolm X used this "chickens coming home to roost" phrase with respect to John F. Kennedy's assassination. But other public figures have used the phrase, speaking about things as dissimilar as 9/11, the overwhelming of California's power grid, the SARS virus, the ethics of corporate Global companies like Volkswagen or Arthur Anderson, or other ecological issues. The point is clear. Left to our own devices, we are in big trouble—which brings us back to Jeremiah. This was his point—Israel's bad decisions over generations brought disaster. Why does Israel seem so surprised?

Yet, on this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent, we see Jeremiah reversing his prophetic field. He prophesies about hope that God's people can expect from the maker of covenants and the deliverer of promises. Hear Jeremiah's prophecy, the day's lesson:

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. [15] 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. [16] 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” (Jer 33:14-16).

Plainly Jeremiah is far beyond expecting anything faithful from Israel. Yet, he sees a glimmer of hope. This hope rests on God and the divine promises made long ago to God’s covenant people. God’s promise said, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). Thus when Jeremiah sees his people in a pitiable state, he remembers God.

Advent is the time in which we stop and remember God’s promises. Of course, we remember these promises against the bleak backdrop of our own world. Advent reminds us that the world is not all that we see. Occasionally, if we look hard enough and long enough we can see the hope God offers us in God’s promises.

In Pieter Brueghel’s painting *Numbering in Bethlehem* we see the 16<sup>th</sup> century in warm, earthen browns and contrasted by the white winter snow. It is a typical December day in a typical Flemish village. In the foreground, someone butchers a squealing pig. Children play on a frozen pond, while nearby, a man struggles with a load of firewood. Appearing also in this tranquil scene we see a young man and a young woman discussing courtship—with only half of the participants really interested. Over the door of the local inn, where the census takers sit, hangs a Christmas wreath. Beyond the wreath, nothing on first inspection suggests anything extraordinary. Nothing on the surface of the painting recommends anything beyond the expected.

Yet, if we look closely, near the bottom of the painting, we see an ordinary looking young woman riding on a donkey led by a weary bearded man. This man, carrying a saw, is leading the beast of burden toward the table where the census takers sit. Mary and her carpenter husband Joseph arrive at the village to be counted. They are so easily overlooked in the midst of ordinariness (Will Willimon, “Advent Into the Everyday,” *On A Wild and Windy Mountain*, Abingdon Press, 1984, pp. 15-17).

Advent reminds us to look for a measure of God in the ordinary and put our trust and hope in that. Jeremiah reminds us that no matter how bleak our world or our circumstances might appear, God is behind the reality, for God is the reality. Amen.