

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

The Sunday of Hope

Based on Jeremiah 33:14-16

*I will make a righteous
Branch sprout from David's
line. (v14b)*

To an ancient thinker, there was nothing prouder than a family name. In a day when few had money and the freedom that came with money, and in a world that had not yet encouraged common folk to strive for something better than the life they had been born into, a family name, a good pedigree, a lineage of fathers and grandfathers, was something that could be held high. And there was no greater family name, than the name of King David. The promise of another king, a Saviour, from the family line of King David himself, was a king worth waiting for.

But what to do in the meantime. Lineage or no, time had a way of moving on, as it still does today. Weeks became months; seasons became years, birth followed death, death followed birth, and yet, the 'righteous branch' had not yet appeared. How long was one to hold on to this HOPE? How did one hold on to HOPE?

"The days are coming," Jeremiah told the people, but when was that exactly?

Perhaps the promise of a Saviour from an ancient holy lineage was not the only promise for the people to hold on to.

*The days are coming,'
declares the Lord, 'when I will
fulfill the good promise I
made to the people of Israel
and Judah. (v14)*

"When I fulfill the good promise I made."

Or as Al Bishop discovered in one of our study bibles this week: '*When I will fulfill the gracious promise I made.*' Isn't that a lovely phrase: the gracious promise. I hear grace. I hear a promise. I hear a softness, a gentility of the whole matter. I hear HOPE.

Grace

My friends, grace is a messy business. Whether you are on the receiving end of it, or wrestling to give it, grace is hard work. It's soul searching, teary, emotional, and sometimes, heart wrenching. It is just so much easier to stay mad or stay sad, then it is to speak the words that need saying, to let go of what holds you back, and move forward with your life. Grace is plain and simple, messy work of the soul.

Promise

It is the promise of eternal life, of better days, peace and calm within, or new experiences and exploration, which keep us a HOPEful people. It was the same HOPE that held the people of old strong during years and sometimes generations of exile, away from home and family. It is what keeps us strong today, in our daily walk and in our faith journeys. We are still, people of the lineage of King David! The history of days past is our history today. Long live the king!

Gracious

The world has never been soft and gentle. To survive in ancient days required grit, stubbornness and determination. I'm not sure much has really changed. There comes a day in each man or woman's life where

they must make their own way into the world, and carve their mark on the 'branch of David's line.' But this grit does not need to make us 'gritty' people. There is a softness, a hush which settles over us, with the re-telling of the journey to Bethlehem, knowing full well, that the reality of Mary and Joseph's story is anything but soft and gentle. Yet, we prepare to

pause, and soak in the hush of the Holy Night. It will fill our empty spaces within, renew our faith in humanity, and energize us to hold on to HOPE once again.

The gracious promise. I see it here at the table today. A place to rest your weary heart. A whisper of a long history, whose story is not yet complete. A gentle

invitation to "Come close and see." (Revelations 6:1)

Let us "Fulfill the gracious promise" together. Let us hold on to HOPE as we search for the Star.

Amen.