

Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, Year C
Sunday, 28.xi.2006, 10:00, Holy Eucharist – LBW 2
Jeremiah 33:14-16, Psalm 25:1-10, 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13, Luke 21:25-36
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

Jesu Juva!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

"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."

--Jeremiah 33:14,15

"Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

--Luke 21:32,33

A promise, if it is more than just words, is a word of *power*. That power comes from the one who makes the promise and from the one who believes it, from the mouth of the one who speaks a word that will come

true, and from the heart that clings to that word. When a promise is *kept*, faith is confirmed and strengthened and doubt and despair is kept within bounds. When a real promise is made, the one who makes it will *make* a way for that promise to be kept. The one who believes that promise will make space for the keeping of that word in an outlook that includes it, that makes room for it. "I just *knew* he would be here when he said he would!" "She can be *trusted*; she has *never* let me down!" We learn about promises in that way, in small ways that may seem small. And that is how we learn to keep them, too.

So, too, do we learn about the word that is *broken*, about the promise that is *not* kept. The false promise, a lie, really, has its own power, but it is

not a power to make our hearts and minds greater, not a power to enlarge our outlook and our hope. Instead, the broken promise and the false hope that attaches to it tears down faith, and narrows the outlook of those who have learned *not* to trust, who have learned, where it suits their purpose, to deceive.

The Bible is holy because it contains within its pages the hope of a people, the family history of a people who that God makes promises and keeps them. This people, the people of God's promise to Israel, believes that God begins the things God intends to do, that God tells of these things and that God will so direct events and humankind's part in that history that God's promises will be kept. God promises to establish a people as a nation, in a certain

place, for as long as that people lives in mercy toward one another and toward others. Even after destruction comes to that people, because they did not keep *their* promise to God, God makes an even greater promise than the promise of the land. Like a living branch growing from the stump of a tree cut down and left for dead, One will rise from among the people to complete God's purposes and promises, that 'righteous branch for David,' the One we expect through repentance in this holy Advent season, the One in Whom we believe God's promises have been kept.

It occurs to me that our own family tree of faith has suffered some severe pruning down through the years. The shape of the tree *has* changed, it is true, as branches have been lost, and we mourn that

loss. But those who remain, those who continue with this people, with this little family as part of the great family of faith, do so, it also seems to me, because of *God's* promises that are kept, also among us, right here, in the Word of the God who welcomes us home in the Sacrament of His fellowship, His communion with us.

It is *that* Word of God, *those* promises God makes and we believe, that we have to offer others, those who do not belong to the past of this place and congregation but rather to our present and our future. The very best thing that we can do to make this a congregation that people will *want* to join and *stay* part of is to preach and hear God's promise of love and forgiveness toward all, to believe that *God*

keeps all His promises, and to lift up our eyes in hope in that faith.

✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and has made of us a Kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. ✠ Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!