

Advent 1 - Jer. 33:14-16 - “I’m Dreaming of a Right Christmas”¹

Before the Lesson: Prepare the equipment needed to show the video, “The Big Story.” Prepare the handout, “I’m Dreaming of a Right Christmas,” for the Transformational Exercise. Have colored pencils, markers, etc. to decorate the paper ornament for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

When do you begin decorating for Christmas?

When did you first hear Christmas music this season?

Information

We are now in Advent, a period of four weeks before we celebrate Christmas. Of course, retail stores have been encouraging us to think about Christmas already with decorative items for sale and Christmas music piping through the stores. As Christians, we must be preparing for Christmas, as well. One way we do that is to look at the ancient prophets who had visions and prophecies about the coming Messiah. Today, we look at Jeremiah.

- Have a class member read Jeremiah 33:14-16.

There are many reasons a person may cut down a tree: to build a house, to make a sunny space for a garden, to have firewood, etc. In the case of Israel, the tree was cut down as an act of judgment. Israel’s kings, David’s descendants, were not faithful to God in their lives and did not lead the people to be faithful to God. As an act of judgment, God sent the Babylonians to attack Israel and take her people into exile. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and Jerusalem itself was razed. The once-tall and beautiful tree of Israel was now nothing more than a stump.

- Have class members read Jeremiah 32:20-24 (Jeremiah’s prayer) and 32:26-32 (God’s response to Jeremiah’s prayer).

Now in exile, Jeremiah prophecies that a “righteous branch” will spring up. A new leader from the house of David – from David’s “family tree” – would come to make things right.

The hope was that Israel’s kings would be righteous. Psalm 72 expresses that hope in song.

- Have a class member read Psalm 72:1-4.

Unfortunately, the kings fell short of these hopes. But as exiled Israel looked to return to its land, hope was renewed.

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“When the king practices justice and righteousness, the city [of Jerusalem] and the land will be healed and saved...The prophetic construct of ‘justice [leads to] well-being’ is not new. What is new is the assurance that royal Israel will act in ways that make new life possible.”²

How does your Bible translate the name at the end of 33:16?

Some translations have the name refer to the new leader, others to the city of Jerusalem. But the point is the name itself. [In the NRSV, “The LORD is our righteousness.” In the Message, “God Has Set Things Right For Us”]

For those listening to Jeremiah, what would it mean to “make things right” for their nation?

“The restoration of fortunes is not simply a matter of abundance, productivity, and partying. It also includes the reestablishment of systems of governance and cult, creating leaders who will rightly render the affairs of the people and will lead them in their worship of God.”³

However, God’s plan is bigger than making things right with the Jews. God wants to make things right for *all* people and *all of creation*.

Show the video of The Big Story by James Choung.

<http://www.jameschoung.net/2007/09/17/the-big-story/> [If you cannot show this to your class, watch it enough before the class time that you can give his outline as you draw his images on the board.]

Do you think most people would agree, “The world is not working right?” What would be some illustrations of that which even the most non-religious person could point to? How does the observation that “things are not right” imply that there is a “right way” that we are missing?

Righteousness is the belief and hope that God is working to make all things right. A righteous life is one in which we live the way God intended us to live in relationship to God, others, and the creation. A righteous person is God’s representative and servant that God uses to accomplish righteousness.

Transformational exercise

Have class members read the following verses from the New Testament. After each verse, ask something like, “How does this verse define righteousness?” or “What does this verse teach us about righteousness?”

- Distribute the handout, “I’m Dreaming of a Right Christmas” along with colored pencils, markers, etc.

Decorate this ornament as you’d like, but also write on it a word or a phrase that refers to God making things right. It might be the word “righteous” or “making all things right” or you may want to include a phrase from one of the Bible verses just read. After you have decorated it, in

² Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 318.

³ Patrick D. Miller, *Jeremiah*, The New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 826.

silence, look at this word or phrase you have written. Offer it as a personal prayer (in silence). Reflect on how you are allowing God to work righteousness through your life.

[Allow time for decoration and silent personal reflection.]

Put this ornament somewhere that you will notice it this week to remind you that Advent is a time of waiting for God to make everything the way God intended it to be.

Close in a prayer something like this: *God, we believe you came to the earth to make all things right. Through Jesus, you came to bring us into a completely fulfilled relationship with you, with others, and with your creation. Give us the faith and hope to trust that you are continuing to make things right. Amen.*

I'm Dreaming of a Right Christmas

Righteousness is the belief and hope that God is working to make all things right. A righteous life is one in which we live the way God intended us to live in relationship to God, others, and the creation. A righteous person is God's representative and servant that God uses to accomplish righteousness.

How do these verses help to define righteousness? What do these verses teach us about righteousness?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6)

Blessed are those who are persecuted for *righteousness* sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:10)

Strive for the Kingdom of God and his *righteousness*, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

Then the *righteous* will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you as a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison, and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it for one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:37-40)

A harvest of *righteousness* is sown in peace for those who make peace. (James 3:18)

The scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as *righteousness*", and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not faith alone. (James 2:23-24)

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sakes he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him, we might become the *righteousness* of God. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for teaching in *righteousness*, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

