

While technically, I realize, that we aren't in winter yet and we've very little of what you might call wintry weather, there are those of us who are already looking forward to Spring. Our text for this evening from the Prophet Jeremiah, speaks of spring, when leaves begin to bud and finally burst forth in a marvelous show of new life. The Lord says through Jeremiah, "***I will make a righteous Branch sprout.*** He is speaking of a tree leafing out as a picture of the King of kings. And as we take a closer look at this picture, please...

Dear Christian friends,

Leaves are a sign of the change of the seasons. Maybe you have seen this one ♦ (Slide description: Lucy, of Snoopy and Peanuts fame, spots the last leaf of fall still attached to a tree. She yells, "Stay up there, you fool!" The leaf nevertheless is caught by a breeze and floats to the ground at her feet. Lucy, now more upset than ever, screams, "Oh, good grief! You wouldn't listen, would you? Now it's the rake and the burning pile . . . You just can't tell them anything!" (Robert L. Short, *The Parables of Peanuts* [New York: Harper & Row, 1968] p. 192).)

♦ It's true, you *can't* tell them anything, especially the leaves that fall from my neighbors' trees. They just keep coming down in my yard! But what a picture of you and me: as leaves, of a sort, ourselves, you can't tell us anything. On our own we're left to a cataclysmic rake and hellish burning pile that Lucy described. We're fluttering and falling in sin, failure, and despair and there is nothing we could have done about it.

But listen to what the Lord inspired Jeremiah to write to a people in the autumn of their lives: ***I will make a righteous Branch sprout.*** OK, great. That just means more leaves to clean up, right!?! But look more closely at who this branch is. This is the promised branch, from the royal line, promised to save God's people. With these words, we see Jesus for who he truly is: ♦ he is the Branch of Israel, rooted in promise, growing in strength, and giving us all the signs of *leafing out*, letting us know that he is on his way so that we may be ready for his return.

Finally, that's what this Advent season is all about. It isn't preparation time for Christmas. It is preparation time for eternity. "The Advent season," writes one author, "in its liturgical observance is devoted to the coming of God at the end of history when Jesus shall reign as King . . . The time is chiefly a celebration of 'the coming of our God' in ultimate triumph" (Gerard S. Sloyan, *Proclamation 3, Advent, Christmas, Series C*, edited by Elizabeth Achtemeier [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985] p. 12). Advent reminds us that Jesus has come as the Babe of Bethlehem, and is coming again as the triumphant King of heaven, just as it had been said.

***"The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah'"*** (Jer 33:14).

In the birth of Jesus, that promise had a majestic fulfillment. But in the coming of Christ again, we are promised the ultimate completion of all that will occur. The Gospel of Christ is ***rooted*** in promise, and that promise reaches through the Lord's nativity and incarnation all the way to the time when he will return.

Isaiah identifies this ***Root*** when he writes ♦, ***"He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground"*** (Is 53:2). ***"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering . . . But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed"*** (Is 53:3-5). ♦ Christ himself attests, ***"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the offspring of David, the bright Morning Star"*** (Rev 22:16).

So while his roots are buried in ancient promises, ♦ he branches out from the royal family of Israel. Again from Jeremiah, ***"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch to sprout from David's line; and he will do what is just and right in the land,"*** (33:15). The Savior is to emanate from a human family, ♦ the house of Jesse, whose son David became Israel's most honored king, from a line of descendants that reaches back across the generations through the likes of Boaz and Ruth, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, and reaching all the way back to Noah and Adam.

And Jesus is *still* branching out into human history. He entered your life and mine through

Baptism. He grows in us, and we in him, through God's Word and Sacraments. He comes to allay our fears, to love us and befriend us, to help us and forgive us. He went out on a limb for us—literally. Humanity was plunged into sin when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit of a tree. But on another tree—the cross—Jesus reached out to redeem us, so that we might dwell with him forever. He came to “*do what is just and right in the land.*” Because “*The Lord is our righteousness,*” as Jeremiah says.

And so, Jesus is rooted in promise. He branches out through human history. ♦ And he is the King who *leafs out* fully as the dazzling Tree of Life, bringing relief from the wintry storms of human life. He gives us a springtime of joy, a season of celebration. He has conquered both sin and death for us. When Christ comes again, it will be as if Spring has sprung. Don't miss it. Let the leafing out of trees and plants be a reminder that the end is near.

Yet you and I need not shake in fright. We trust God's promises that in the new heavens and earth there will stand the tree of life, and ♦ “*the leaves of [this] tree* as John records in his Revelation, *are for the healing of the nations*” (Rev 22:2).

Angela Elwell Hunt has retold a traditional folktale in her *Tale of Three Trees* (Batavia, Illinois: Lion Picture Story, 1989). ♦ Three young trees grew as a little family atop a high mountain. They dreamed of what they would like to be. One delighted in the glitter of the star-filled nights and said, “I want to be covered with gold and filled with precious stones. I want to be the most beautiful treasure chest in the world.”

The second tree grew near a trickling brook that wended its way into a river and finally out to sea. “I want to be a strong sailing ship, traveling mighty waters and carrying powerful kings.”

The third tree looked down on the villages in the valley below and asserted, “I want to grow so tall that when people stop to look at me they will raise their eyes to heaven and think of God.”

Years passed by. One day three woodcutters arrived. One by one the trees fell to the woodcutters' axes.

The first tree, who wanted to be a treasure chest, was made into a feedbox. The second tree, who dreamed of becoming a majestic sailing ship, was made into a tiny fishing boat. And the

third tree, who wanted to grow so high, was turned into lumber.

Years later, the feedbox found itself holding a Baby and drenched in golden starlight. Suddenly the first tree knew it was holding the world's greatest Treasure.

The second tree found itself sailing on the waters of a small lake. One evening a wearied traveler and his companions climbed aboard the little boat, only to encounter a terrific storm. The tired man had gone to sleep. The other passengers were terrified, but when the tired man awoke, he stretched out his hand and ordered the storm to end. The second tree then knew it was carrying the greatest King of all.

One Friday some months later, the third tree was startled to discover it was being removed from the lumberyard. It flinched as it was carried through a jeering mob. It shuddered when soldiers nailed a man's hands to its branched arms. It felt abused and misused. By Sunday morning, the third tree knew that God's love had turned the ugliness of Good Friday into the beauty of Easter.

God's love-made-flesh had made the first tree beautiful beyond its dreams. The second tree was honored to carry a King far more majestic than it hoped. And the third tree would now cause everyone to think of God each time they saw its cross-shaped silhouette.

Maybe your life hasn't turned out quite the way you thought it would. The unexpected, the inexplicable, and the intangible have all left you wondering what God was thinking and what he has planned. And while the story of the three trees is but a fable, the truth is that God has a way of accomplishing his purposes to the glory of his name: with him, the unexpected is welcome, the inexplicable is understood, and the intangible is made rock solid. Just look at the true story of *the King who leafed out*. ♦ He is the answer to every troubling question and the only source of hope and light in this sin-darkened world. So hang on to Jesus. For he is rooted in promise, he has branched out through human history, and he leafs out as a sign that joy awaits all those sheltered under his cross. There is nothing in this life to anxiously fear. There is only his arrival to eagerly anticipate. Come, Lord, Jesus. Quickly come. Amen

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## Sermon Notes:

The King who Leafed Out  
Jeremiah 33:14-16

- He is ROOTED in PROMISE.
- He BRANCHES OUT through HUMAN HISTORY.
- He LEAFS OUT as the TREE OF LIFE.

## 5 Questions:

1. Read Luke 21:25-36 then discuss how the phrase *the days are coming* (Jeremiah 33:14) means something different to believers than to unbelievers.
2. Take the *leafing out* a little further. Read John 15:1-8. What is the connection between the repeated words *remain in me*, *love* and, *bearing fruit*?
3. Spend some time with *The Tale of the Three Trees*. The text can be found at:  
[www.bible.org/illustration/story-three-trees](http://www.bible.org/illustration/story-three-trees)  
A video can be found at:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj1OViJIM3U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj1OViJIM3U)
4. Isaiah adds to the *branch* illustration used by Jeremiah. Share a time when your life seemed like a *stump* only to have a *shoot* and *fruit* come out of it.
5. The name Zedekiah means “The Lord, my righteousness.” What do the names mean in your family? Consider some other interesting Bible names and their meanings: Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus 18:3,4); Samuel (1 Samuel 1:20); Hephzibah (Isaiah 62:4); Barnabus (Acts 4:36). A complete list of Bible names and meanings can be found at 1. A complete list of Bible names can be found at:  
[www.behindthename.com/names/usage/biblical](http://www.behindthename.com/names/usage/biblical)