

Sermon - 23 November 2025

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 November 2025

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] The word of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.! Please be seated.

Good morning. We are at the last Sunday of the church year. This is the Sunday next before Advent.

And typically called Stir Up Sunday, taken from our collect. Brothers and sisters, we live as Christians, have always lived with one foot in each kingdom.

On the one hand, that phraseology is not original to me, but I heard it and I said that is actually true and it's particularly pertinent for the turn of the years as we think of it.

So we live with one foot in each kingdom. On the one hand, we go through the ordinary routines of this world. Work, family, responsibilities, worries.

[1:12] And on the other hand, scripture reminds us again and again that the kingdom to which we truly belong is not of this world.

The New Testament affirms this truth. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our hope is anchored beyond the horizon of the visible.

And our identity is rooted in a kingdom that cannot be shaken. But like the people of Israel in Jesus' day, we often blur these two realms in unhealthy ways.

We mistake earthly concerns for heavenly realities. We let the pressures of this age drown out the promises of the age to come.

We know who we are. We know to whom we belong. But daily life and the stresses of our daily life, of our earthly life, makes us forget.

[2:21] Too often. So this is one of the gifts of marking the church's calendar. Because week by week, month by month, season by season, it quietly and patiently reorients us back to God.

And the rhythms of God. And reminds us that we do not belong to this passing world. We belong to the age to come. We are citizens of another and greater kingdom.

It calls us back to the reality we so easily set aside. That although we inhabit this world, it is not our home. We may be in it, but we are not of it.

And today, the Sunday next before Advent, serves as a kind of bridge, actually. We look back, as it were, across the long season of Trinity tide. We've been learning how to live faithfully in this present age.

And we look now towards Advent, when we rehearse the great promise that God would not leave His people in exile forever.

[3:35] Trinity tide trains us for our short momentary life here on this earth. Advent teaches us to long for the eternal life that awaits us at our Lord's appearing.

So this final Sunday of the church here, we are called and we're invited to lift our eyes. It nudges us away from the narrowness of earthly concerns.

And points us again to the wide horizon of eternity. It invites us to remember where our true home is.

And to live, even now, even today, as citizens of that coming kingdom. So let's look then at our two lessons of today.

In fact, this is one of the few Sundays where the epistle reading, and I say that intentionally, that is taken from the Old Testament.

[4:42] So we're going to be actually in Jeremiah 23. I think that's page 773 of your pew Bible. So I invite you to open. I do think I got that right. Yes, page 773.

So we're going to be in Jeremiah reading this morning. And we'll look at this promise. And I think it's proper that we should look to the prophets as we await the coming of the King, the promised one.

And see what these prophets say concerning His advent. Jeremiah says, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch.

A righteous branch. As Advent draws near, these words from the prophet Jeremiah becomes our doorway into the hope of the Messiah. We're meant to remember and to think of His humanity, His kingship, His righteousness, and His saving power.

However, this reading is placed here on Sunday night before Advent, because it reads almost like a statement of faith for believers, for God's covenant people.

[6:08] In just a few verses, Jeremiah confesses what we confess each week. That the Christ will reign over us.

That He will judge us in righteousness. And He will save us from all our enemies. But before Jeremiah spoke these words, God's people, Israel, were losing hope.

The kingdom of David had crumbled. Jerusalem suffered under corrupt rulers and approaching armies. It looked as if the promises of God that He made to David were withering on a dead stump, signified by a lineage bereft of a worthy ruler.

And into that darkness and void, God spoke through His prophet, I will raise up for David a righteous branch.

The prophet draws on Isaiah's imagery. A branch. As you read that, don't think of that tree outside the window and those healthy, big branches that are jutting out of it.

[7:23] Think of a sprout. Which is also a branch, technically. But think of a sprout. A shoot. That's the connotation of the word in Hebrew, actually.

But God says, And that's the imagery of Isaiah. A branch, a tender shoot, a living sprout, from what looked like a dead family tree.

God says, I will raise one up. I will raise up life and hope out of despair and darkness and death.

David's line seemed finished and cut down at this point in Jeremiah's time.

David, the righteous king. David, the one after God's own heart. But his descendants, most of them, have run away from God. And it has just been a devolution, to use it, for lack of a better word, of the lineage.

So by the time of Jeremiah, they were a vassal king. They were under the thumb of a ruling empire, Babylon.

[8:37] In fact, the true king is in exile. He's a prisoner in Babylon. Jeremiah tells us that the future of God's people will not grow, though.

Even as you look at it, Jeremiah is saying, The future of God's people will not grow from human strength or political stability. Where will it grow from? From a tender shoot.

From God's own chosen king. And so we turn to the prophecy. And see, we see in this prophecy, Christ revealed. Particularly five clear ways.

Five clear rays of hope. He is going to be the righteous branch. The Hebrew word, as I said before, that speaks of branch here, is unmistakably personal.

Jeremiah is not speaking of a nation, nor an idea. That's not what's going to rescue the people. He's speaking of a person. Zechariah, another prophet, confirms this by calling this Messiah the branch.

[9:48] You know the Messiah, the promised Messiah had many names. Throughout the promises, the prophets, they gave him many names. One of his particular names was the branch.

It's actually a proper name that's meant to speak about the Messiah. And Zechariah, in Zechariah 3, it says, I would bring forth my servant, the branch.

In Zechariah 6, it says, The man whose name is the branch. That is one of the titles of the Messiah. And Jeremiah says, This branch, God promises to raise up.

This branch will be born as a true son of David. A real human being. One who shares our nature, yet stands apart in righteousness. The gospel writers go out of their way to show that Jesus comes from David's line.

Not merely to fulfill a genealogy, but to reveal that God's eternal plan always involved taking on our flesh. The Messiah is not distant from us.

[10:52] He is born of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He is one of us, yet without sin. He is the branch who grows in the soil of our humanity.

As the second Adam. Who will come to restore all that the first Adam had lost. And so, that's the one first ray of hope. This is the branch God will raise up.

The Messiah's humanity. And then the second ray of hope is that this branch is going to be king and judge. We're told of his royal and judicial majesty. Jeremiah continues.

And he says, This branch that I will raise up, He shall reign as king and deal wisely. And shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

It is a land bereft of justice. He is a land bereft of righteousness. Foolish kings. And God says, I will raise up this branch.

[11 : 50] He will be a true king. He will reign. And he will deal wisely. He will execute justice. He will bring righteousness back to the land. This is no ordinary king.

His wisdom is not the shrewdness of politicians. Or the calculations of generals. His justice is not partial. He's not corruptible. He's not flawed by human weakness.

You know, when later Gabriel announces the birth of Christ, He repeats Jeremiah's words. He says, The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.

Brothers and sisters, Only Christ fulfills this picture that we see before us. Earthly kings fail. They've always failed. David himself failed.

Zedekiah, who is the current king at Jeremiah's time, Whose name actually means, The Lord is my righteousness. That's what Zedekiah means. He ruled. He ruled at the time of Jerusalem.

[12 : 54] He is anything but righteous. For Christ, Christ reigns with wisdom. A wisdom that cannot be deceived.

He reigns with justice that cannot be bought. He is the king who reigns not only over a land, But over our hearts. He judges not simple actions, But he judges motives.

He sees into your hearts. And his judgments are true. This is a comfort to us, Brothers and sisters.

And then third ray of hope, Is that we're meant to see this Christ, As the savior of his people.

Salvation and safety, Can only be found in him. Jeremiah says, In his days, Judah will be saved.

And Israel will dwell securely.

Many might ask, How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy, Since he wasn't a political leader, Or military savior of Israel. But you know, Jeremiah is not speaking about earthly dwelling, Or deliverance from foreign armies.

[14 : 06] Jeremiah is speaking of something even greater. He's speaking of the deeper chasm, Between man and God. And of the judgment of death, That hangs over all of us, Because of our rebellion, And our sin.

Jeremiah is speaking of the salvation, Of God's true Israel. A Israel that is not limited, To ethnic descent, But includes all, Who belong to Christ.

Jew and Gentile together. Male and female. The church is the people, Gathered from every tribe, And tongue, And nation, And united, In the Messiah.

And what kind of salvation, Does Jesus bring? It's not a temporary, Political relief. But it's eternal deliverance, From sin, And death, And fear.

That's the salvation, Jeremiah is speaking of. And, As the son of Zechariah says, Zechariah is John the Baptist's father, In this song, He says this line, Delivered, That is, This Messiah will come, He will deliver us, From the ends of our enemies, That we might serve him, That we might serve him, Without fear.

[15 : 28] Zedekiah, Zedekiah knows, What it means to serve God, With fear. He's a prophet, That has to go into the Holy of Holies, With fear and trepidation. But here is the promise, Of this Messiah, When he comes, He will deliver us, From the hands of our enemies, That we might serve him, Without fear.

This is the security, Jeremiah spoke of. A salvation, That reaches to the uttermost. A safety, That nothing in this world, Can threaten.

Christ gives his people, Eternal refuge. In him, We dwell securely, Even in the midst, Of a hostile world, In the midst, And so, Firstly, We're meant to see this, Fourth ray of hope, That Christ, Is our righteousness.

Jeremiah continues, He says, This is the name, By which he shall be called, The Lord, Our righteousness. The Lord, Our righteousness, Is his name. Here the curtain, Is pulled back.

The promised king, Is not only, The son of David, He is the son of God, To call him, The Lord, Our righteousness, Is not a human name.

[16 : 53] Here, He's calling him, By God's proper name, Yahweh, Tzikin, Tzikin, This Messiah, Will be called, Yahweh Tzikin, The Lord, Our righteousness.

He is no mere human. He is called, By the divine name itself. This name, Declares to profound truths, To us. It tells us, Of his full divinity.

This, Branch, That comes, This Messiah, That comes, Is no mere human, Because he bears, The name of the Lord. But it also tells us, That, His saving work, Is our righteousness.

That his work, Will be our righteousness. Paul echoes this prophecy, When he tells us, That Christ became for us, Righteousness. And that we, Are made the righteousness, Of God, In him.

So that our justification, Our right standing, Before God, That's what justification means. Our ability to stand, Before God, Without fear, Without trepidation. That righteousness, That justification, Comes, Not from our own efforts, But from the righteousness, Of Christ, That has been given, And gifted to us.

[18:13] Imputed to us. Jeremiah may also, Be making a contrast, At this point, With the king of Israel. Remember I said, Zedekiah's name means, The Lord is, The righteousness of the Lord.

But this king, Isn't nothing, Anything but, Anything but righteous. But here will be, A true Zedekiah, A true righteous king, Who will come.

Christ alone, Is our righteousness. We're meant to look at that, And be reminded of that. And then, The fifth ray of hope, Is that, It points us, This promise of Jeremiah, Points us, To a greater exodus. God's ultimate deliverance, That can only be found in Christ. Finally, Jeremiah says, That this coming salvation, Will overshadow, The exodus itself.

Remember that Israel's, Great story of salvation, Always looks back, To Egypt, And the deliverance, On Passover, And then, The deliverance of God's people, Through the exodus, Into the promised land.

[19:21] But here, Jeremiah says, They should no longer say, As the Lord lives, Who brought Israel out of Egypt. But they will say, As the Lord lives, Who brought up, And led the offspring, Of the house of Israel, Out of the north country, And out of all the countries, He had driven them.

And then, They shall dwell, In their own land, Securely. In other words, God's greatest act, Of deliverance, Would not be the Passover, The rescue from Egypt, And bringing them, Through the wandering, Forty years, Of the wilderness, But it will be, Something far greater.

It will be something, Global, Something eternal, We see this, In the worldwide, Gathering of God's people, Through Christ, In revelation. The prophets, Echoed this, Again and again.

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Zephaniah, Zechariah, All of these prophets, Speaking of a new creation, A restored people, An everlasting kingdom.

Christ, Is the true, And final exodus. In him, God leads his people, Out of slavery, To sin.

[20:39] In him, God, Gathers his children, From every nation. In Christ, God brings us home, To a land, Not of soil, But of God's, Benevolent presence.

And this is why, The church reads, Jeremiah today. Because, It serves as, As kind of a threshold, That we stand on, As we enter into Advent.

The old year ends, By fixing our eyes, On the coming king. The branch, Is growing. The king, Is reigning.

The Lord, Our righteousness, Has come. And the greater exodus, Is on the way. And so, With this in view, We look at the gospel reading.

This promise, That the branch will come. And then we look, At this reading, Of this great miracle, And the fulfillment, Of Jeremiah's, Prophecy, Before our eyes, In the gospel reading, In John 6, In the feeding of the, Of the 5,000.

[21:46] And look at the setting, In John 6, As it unfolds. This story unfolds, At a moment, Of deep national sadness, For Israel. And a period of uncertainty.

Not unlike, Jeremiah's days. They're still under subjugation, Under, Under foreign rule, And oppression. In fact, The great prophet, John the Baptist, The voice crying, In the wilderness, Has just been murdered, By Herod.

The people are shaken, Hope seems fragile, But they follow Jesus, As he leads them, Into a lonely place, And Jesus leading them, Into this place, Is not accidental.

Just as Moses led Israel, Into the wilderness, To feed them with manna, Jesus, The true and greater Moses, Brings the people out, Where God's provision, Can be seen, And manifested to them.

Their physical hunger, Mirrors their spiritual hunger, And the Lord intends, To satisfy both of it. So here before us, Stands, The promised branch, From Jeremiah's prophecy.

[22:55] Not only righteous in himself, But life giving, To all who come to him. His kingdom is not theoretical, Or distant. It is here among us, Visible, In compassion, Provision, And abundance.

And so let's look at that miracle, The king's provision, Overflowing. The disciples, Can only see scarcity, As they gather, Before these grow. We're told there's 5,000, You do know there is more than 5,000, There's just the men, Who were counted.

And so they'll probably, Triple the amount, 15 to 20,000 people here, Gathered. And the disciples, Can only see the scarcity. They only have 5 loaves, And 2 fish.

And they have thousands of people, Before them. But Jesus sees opportunity, Not obstacle. He blesses the meager offering, That is brought before him. And he, In turn, Turns insufficiency, Into super abundance.

This is God's way, Brothers and sisters. This is why we must cling to God, Even as we enter into the new year. There is so many temptations, To look for abundance, Insufficiency, Elsewhere.

[24:07] But it can only be found in Christ. Fix your eyes on him. Turn your eyes to Jesus. The crowd recognizes this, As God, As this miracle unfolds, What happens?

Everyone eats. Everyone. Everyone, Not only eats, But they are satisfied. When the meal is finished, 12 baskets, Overflow, With fragments, Were gathered.

Enough to remind each disciple, That in the kingdom of Christ, Nothing given to him, Is wasted. Do you believe that, Brothers and sisters? That nothing that you offer to God, Nothing is wasted.

The crowd recognizes the sign, As they saw it. This is why, The gospel reading, Ends with this statement, This is indeed, The prophet, Who is to come into the world.

They recognize, What they've just seen. And they remembered, And they remembered, Moses' prophecy, That a greater prophet, Prophet is coming. And as they see, This miracle unfolds, Before them, They said, He is the prophet, Spoken of.

[25:19] They see in Jesus, The fulfillment, Of all the hopes, That Jeremiah, Isaiah, And Moses held before them. This before them, Is the king who reigns, By giving, And feeding, And healing, And restoring.

Here is the branch, In action. The king who brings life, To barren places. So how are we to apply, This to ourselves?

Well we, I think first we must, Look at it, This miracle, And see that it teaches us, How Christ works, Even in our lives today.

Christ calls us, To seek first the kingdom, That is his kingdom, Not our kingdom, Not this earthly kingdom, But to seek first, His kingdom, The kingdom, Trusting that everything else, We truly need, Will be provided for us.

That's his promise. Christ also shows us, That God's provision, Is not stingy. He doesn't give sparingly, He doesn't give, Barely enough to get by, He gives lavishly, He gives abundantly, He gives to overflowing.

[26:35] And then, As some positive minds us, In Colossians 1, Christ wants us to see that, In Christ, In him, St. Paul says this, In him, All the fullness of God, Was pleased to dwell.

All the fullness of God, Pleased to dwell in Christ. And through him, To reconcile, That is to bring peace, To himself, To reconcile to himself, All things, Whether on earth, Or in heaven, Making peace, By the blood of his cross.

Christ multiplies, What we place in his hands, Our gifts, Our time, Our love, Our faithfulness, Our small obedience, He multiplies, He multiplies it all.

He is sufficient, To meet our needs. He fills his people, With grace, Not simply for survival, But so that we may, Overflow in serving others. The branch, Nourishes his branches, And his branches, Then go out, And bear fruit, For the kingdom of God.

Christ's kingdom, Is already, And not yet. The advent reminds us, That we live between, These two great dawns, Of the already and not yet. The prophet Jeremiah, Foretold the first coming, Of this Messiah.

[27:59] But as we, As we look, And remember that he has come, Jesus himself also foretold, That he is coming again. When the king will return, In his majesty, And gather his people, And judge the world, And make all things new.

So as we, Now presently, Are in the middle, Of his two comings. As we live in this reality, We must live, Understanding, That his rule is real.

Right? There are many competing claims, Around the world, Aren't there? There are many kings, Many messiahs, Many political leaders, Who promise to save you, And deliver you. Many schemes. But there is only one savior. There is only one true king. And as we stand, On the edge, Of a new church here. It is fitting, For us to reflect, On that reality.

To remember, That we have one king, And we are his people. And it also, Important for us, To reflect, About the blessings, That the king, Has given you, This past year.

[29:08] Has given us, As his people, This past year. Gifts of grace, Opportunities for service, Strength to endure, Trials. Those are all, Gifts from him.

Moments of joy, Moments of conviction, As he draws you, To back to himself. He has given us, Brothers and sisters, Loaves and fishes, Multiplied, Beyond expectation.

And I think, Upon honest reflection, I think all of us, Might say, Some of these blessings, That he has given us, We have used well. But some we have wasted. And Christ's gentle command, Still comes to us, Gather up the fragments, Redeem the wasted opportunities, Recover the neglected duties, Restore the practices, Of prayer, And worship, And service, That may have slipped away, In the past year.

And recommit yourself, To your king, Prepare to enter the new year, Ready to serve Christ, Kingdom, With renewed devotion. The colleagues, For this Sunday, Ask God, To stir up our wills. It's an honest confession. Our wills, Do not naturally, Rouse themselves, To holiness. But God can stir them.

[30:39] He can awaken desire in us. He can strengthen, Our obedience. He can revive, Our fainting hearts. And when he stirs, Our wills, Fruit follows, Fruit that glorifies him, And blesses the world around us.

And he promised that none of it, Will be in vain. His reward is rich. So brothers and sisters, As we close this year of grace, And step into advent, As God, We must ask God, To rekindle our desire.

Let us ask him, Let us ask him, To renew our strength, And ask him, To deepen our obedience.

Because though we live, With one foot planted, In this passing world, We know, As a surety, That the other foot, Is planted firmly, In the unshakable kingdom, Of Christ, Our King.

So brothers, Sisters, Young and whole, As citizens, Of that celestial kingdom, Live in his grace, Use his gifts, Serve his kingdom, A weight, Is coming.

For the branch has come, And the King shall come again. Let us pray. Stir up, We beseech you, O Lord, The wills of your faithful people, That we abundantly, Bringing forth the fruit of good works, May be lavishly rewarded, Through Christ our Lord.

[32:12] Amen.