

**A Bigger Dream**  
**Jeremiah 33:14-16**

**November 28, 2021 Sermon by Rev. Alex Creager**

*14The 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. 15In 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. 16In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."*

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Riding home from track practice one day in middle school, a friend of mine started talking about what he thought heaven would be like. How we got onto that conversation, I have no idea. But it stuck with me all these years later. Because he had such a vivid image of what this looked like. He said,

“I think heaven is going to be a place where you can do whatever you want every part of the day. In the morning you can ride roller coasters without any lines. In the afternoon go skiing in Colorado. In the evening, be at a beach and ride perfect waves. The next day play football with friends, then go to a waterpark, then hike a mountain.”

It sounded like a pretty great time to me as a kid. Maybe especially since we lived in Ohio, and had neither mountains nor beaches nearby. Escaping the everyday grind, getting to go wherever you want and do whatever you want every minute of every day. And it still sounds pretty great to me now. At least for a day or a week.

But now as an adult, and having had chances to travel and see more of the world, I know that going to beautiful, fantastic places can be fun, even joyful or peaceful. But they don't fix everything. Problems and struggles, worries and fears, they don't just magically disappear by going to a different place. Wherever we go, we still bring our whole selves with us. And we still are living in a broken and fearful world. We still have arguments. We still get angry and fight. We still say things we wish we could take back. And even in the most beautiful of places, we still see poverty and hunger, inequality and violence, bigotry and exclusion. No beach resort or ski slope or amusement park has fixed that yet.

And so while my friend's description of heaven sounds like a great vacation, there has to be more to the Kingdom of God. It has to be more than an escape, more than a fleeing from one place to the next. Instead of an escape, the Kingdom of God must be a wholesale change. It must be a change, a transformation of everything. Of our world flipped upside down. And ourselves flipped upside down.

In both of our readings today, from the prophet Jeremiah, and from Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, we hear good news of God's salvation and hope. But in both that good news looks different than what we expect.

First, it is not a private salvation. God is not just saving or changing or transforming me. God's salvation is one for the whole community, the whole city, the whole world. It is not an individualistic salvation, but a community-wide one. At the very end of scripture, in Revelation 21 and 22, we got a beautiful image of the Kingdom of God. There is gardens and trees, a crystal clear river, and food for all. God's light is shining everywhere. But what is most surprising of this image is that the Kingdom of God is described as a city, where we all people, across language and nationality, background, class, and economic status, all live together.

That's very different than how we might think of salvation. We often think of it in terms of a private salvation, in this sterilized, white-washed heaven, that's very quiet and isolated.

But throughout scripture the prophets and psalmists speak of salvation being for the whole community. Paul speaks of it being for the whole world. And Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God as something we can start to see in our world today. In Jesus' parables and stories, the Kingdom is not described as this far off place an individual escapes to. Instead, it is described as our everyday world – of wheat and mustard seeds, of lamps and of family and friends, of meals and neighbors – but all of it made right. All of it made whole. The stranger, the Samaritan, showing us what love looks like. The Son who left his family being welcomed back with loving arms and a big party. The sheep who has been outcast and forgotten being carried back home and welcomed fully into the fold.

Salvation is not just for me, or even you. God's hope, God's saving work, God's dream is for all of us, to share it together.

So the second part of this hope then is for us to be changed ourselves, to live into this new community, this new way of life, this incredible, joyful, kingdom of God. It can't be the full Kingdom of God if we are the same people we've always been. If we still live full of jealousy and hatred, greed and envy, back-biting and gossip, judgment and bigotry. The city won't work. The kingdom of God needs more.

It needs us to be transformed by God's love and grace. It needs us to let go of enmity and hate, of bigotry and judgment, of lust and greed. And it needs us to be filled by God's light. Jeremiah says that salvation is when justice and righteousness is executed in the land. Paul says that salvation is when our hearts seek holiness, and when we abound in love for one another.

Now, this is a very big task. I'm not there yet, and not sure I'm really all that close either. But we don't have to get there alone. It's not on our own strength. God isn't done with me. And God isn't done with any of us. God is still at work in our world. Christ has broken into creation, and

Christ will do it again. Not to whisk us away. Not to have us flee. But to make us whole. To fill us with love. To lead us into that true city of light, that Kingdom of God.

If that is our hope, if that is scripture's vision of salvation, then how do we live into it today? How do we strive to become true citizens of the Kingdom of God/ Not by passively sitting and waiting. Not by shutting off the world forever. But by inviting God to change us here and now. By seeking community. By welcoming neighbors and strangers, those who may be similar, but especially those who come from different backgrounds and languages and places. By praying for friends. And praying for enemies. By listening to the voices of prophets long ago, and the voices of prophets still alive today.

By caring, working, serving and giving, for justice, love, and mercy. Because as we serve, as we give, as actually put our faith into action, God shapes us, God changes us. And God changes our world.

This hope is a big hope. It is a big dream. But it starts in everyday ways, of working for justice, of seeking righteousness, and of loving one another. That is how we live into hope today. Amen.