

January 3rd, 2021

First Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31: 7-14, Ephesians 1: 3-14, John 1: 1-18, "Indulging in God"

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Grace and peace in the name of God our loving Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Happy New Year! I hope you leaned into the readings for today. If you are reading this at home, please read the texts for today outloud, and listen for the words and lines that most speak to you today.

In John 1, we hear that God came to us as the Word. And we know that words have value and as God expresses who God is through Jesus, we also share in that communication when we proclaim Jesus through our words. And we lean into the words that reminds us of God's love for us and our neighbor.

In our texts today there are many rich words that remind us of the joy of being in God's presence and the gift of a God that comes to us. In Jeremiah we hear of a gathering of people in celebration!

**¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.**

**¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.**

I will turn their mourning into joy,

I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

**¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the Lord.**

The theme that connects all of these lessons for me is words that describe the fullness we receive in God. I don't actually know what it means that priests will receive their fill of fatness, but it sounds like a very indulgent experience. And I love the line before it that young women will "Rejoice in the dance and young men and the old shall be merry." This sounds like Christmas merriment to me. A reminder that God wants us to have times to experience joy. In the church calendar we have 12 days of Christmas not just one. And today we enjoy the lush texts of a Second Sunday of Christmas.

And in Ephesians this theme continues: **⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us.**

What a gift to be swept up into the arms of a loving God, as we are adopted as Children of our heavenly Father, a parent that treats us with more love and care than we can imagine and wipes away the tears of mourning for what we don't have and deeper into the hug of grace, even if we can't yet manage a dance of joy.

And in the Gospel of John we remember the reason for the season.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,¹⁵ full of grace and truth". And John the Baptist tells the people, "¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷

With these words, God obviously wants us to lean into more Christmas merriment again today. God wants to lavish the fullness of grace on us again as we gather in God's word for us. The Word made flesh.

We know that this Christmas season we may have been reminded of how the gathering of Jeremiah didn't happen yet. And we long for a time when we can gather together in bigger groups and dance and have joy in each other's presence, instead of worry about whether we are superspreading in the process! God's promise has new meaning as we close out 2020 and live into new hope of the year 2021.

The last few weeks I have been thinking about what it means to be rich as I have been following the rise of Bit Coin and thinking of how people who invested a small amount a few years ago now may have a fortune as it has nearly doubled its value in a few weeks. My preaching tutor at Luther Seminary's son is one of those people. Fortune magazine called him Crypto's Crown Prince in an article last year. My sister Lucy knew his family to and used to babysit him while she was in college. She still has a picture of him playing on a swingset up at her house because it reminded her of happy times with this joyful little boy. She just recently learned he is now a multimillionaire. Do I want a part of that fortune? Sure. I'm sure none of us would turn down a winning lottery ticket either, but those riches and worries about money make us forget what we already have? The richness of our relationships. People that love us for who we are. And a God who loves us as we are...

In these texts I hear God reminding us of what is truly important and what is consistent when nothing else seems to be. God's love for us in Jesus is always there no matter what our circumstance is.

And God wants us to indulge in that love and share. This is the inheritance we are promised in Ephesians. God does not want us to pass it by or put off the riches of this relationship. That's what the Christmas season is about. Our Gospel reminds us that when Jesus came to us, when God showed up in our midst, we did not recognize him. ¹⁰“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own,^[a] and his own people did not accept him.” In John we hear that Jesus was life. That all things were created through him and yet, when he is in our midst, he was ignored by most and even mistreated.

Today, is a reminder that God wants us to not make the same mistake. Just like Scrooge waking up on Christmas morning in the Christmas Carol, there is still time remember what is most valuable is not money, power or fame. There is time for us to live into the dance and find the joy of life with God again, and Jesus who is life, who made life. Even in the midst of a dark time, John reminds us that a light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.

God wants us to enjoy the light and the life we have in Christ. Even to indulge in it. And this is something we can do on our own when we can't be with others, because this is the promise that we are never alone.

As I think about what it means to indulge in the lavishness of God's love and grace for me I have a new image in my head. I've been spending a lot of time with a cat named Pickles when I am at Sarah and Paul's place. And Pickles has started to have this habit, when he knows I am getting ready to go or focusing on something else, he comes near me, within my view, and he lies down and rolls over on his back. And he looks up at me and with his eyes

seems to say, "Don't you have time for a few more pets or a belly scratch? Can't you enjoy being with me a little more?"

I usually am reminded of God by dogs, but I am quickly becoming a cat person I think and it's affecting my theology! Cats are really good and indulging and inviting us into love in their presence. And while God is often the one who sweeps us up into his arms, I also have this image of God showing up in our busy lives, like a cat, beckoning us and inviting us to be near him, to indulge in the love God gives to us over and over again. Maybe we can even hear the "Purr" of the Word when we do it. When we indulge in God's grace and take time to celebrate God in our midst.

Whatever image or word you use to remind you of God's companionship and presence, indulge in it as much as possible! Let God's love and grace be lavished on you so that you can experience the fullness of God with you today and everyday!

May the promises of God light up your hearts tonight and the hope, love, joy, and peace of Christ be with you!