

Welcome to Advent!

My name is Jeremiah – one of the prophets of the Old Testament. As a prophet – my role is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. You get to decide which you are.

I lived a long time ago – a good 600 years before the one you call your lord and savior – Jesus Christ – was even born.

So what might I have to say to you that is relevant? Well, have you ever heard the saying that the more things change, the more they stay the same? I think it might be applicable to what I am about to say to you – but you can draw your own conclusions. . .

Scripture scholars through the years have often called me the most pessimistic—and the most optimistic – of the prophets.

I am very pessimistic, that is not filled with much hope – when I looked at the people around me. They called themselves believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were people of the covenant which meant they were supposed to know how much God loved them – and then live their lives in gratitude for that great gift of God’s love.

Well, they certainly must have been suffering from spiritual amnesia! For they were far from being the people God was calling them to be – and that’s what made me so pessimistic and a bit cynical. The people around me, my people—God’s people – were living life the way they wanted: filled with greed, jealousy, hate, and injustice. They lied to one another, stole from each other. They were unfaithful and ungrateful – disobedient to God’s love and law.

I once told them they were like a bunch of rotten figs – they may have still looked good on the outside – but if eaten, would leave a horrid, lingering taste in one’s mouth.

And yet – they insisted on calling themselves God’s chosen ones!!!!

My precarious job – and that’s why I once cursed God for giving it to me – was to remind them as bad and as wretched as they were – God still loved them! And this is what gets my optimistic side going. . .

The God I believed in – the God I followed – the God who did call me to be a prophet --- was a God of hope, of praise, of power, and of an unstoppable will to make the people of Israel --- HOLY!

Now this is when I invite you to be a bit introspective --- look around at your world, at your community, at your Church, at your family, and, of course ---- at yourself ---- do you see any unfaithful, ungrateful, greedy, hateful, dishonest and deceitful people around you?? Any who are disobedient to God’s law and love??

And I bet some of them insist on calling themselves God’s chosen ones!!!

You see why I said the more things change – the more they stay the same? But you be the judge of that. . .

But recall – I was sent to remind the people of Israel that no matter how far they strayed – God still loved them! So if any of what I have said rings true for you and the people around --- remember – this--- especially ---- God loves you!

Are you and those around you living holy and blameless lives, conducting yourselves in a way worthy of the calling you have received –as St. Paul asks the Thessalonians??

Are you and those around you responding to God’s call to justice – living in right relationship with one another??

Are you and those around you allowing your hearts to become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life?

Do you need a little help with it all?? Then remember that God loves you. . .

How do you deal with the messes you make of your life and the messes life throws your way?? Just remember that God loves you.

For if you try to fix things on your own, think you can get it all figured out and straightened out all by yourself – then you are doomed to failure – you have to remember that God – and God alone – will put into your heart and the hearts of all his people – the power to change --- it's his love --- THE POWER TO CHANGE – IS GOD'S LOVE.

And God's love is a gift that just has to be accepted with open hands and open hearts. We can't buy it. We can't earn it. We cannot deny it or take it from someone else--- IT'S A GIFT – FREELY GIVEN.

My challenge to you good people during these first days of Advent as you take your first steps toward Bethlehem — is to do two things:

First – realize you need the gift of God's love. Because in some way shape or form – you have messes in your life – and probably more than just a few . . .

And second – the way to deal with those messes is to open yourself to receive the gift of God's love. Because God's love – is the power to change.

So realize you need the gift of God's love --- and open your heart to receive it.

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O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. And ransom captive Israel. That mourns in lowly exile here. Until the son of God appear.

Rejoice, Rejoice. Emmanuel. Shall come to thee O Israel.