

11.28.21 A1 Hope in the Midst of the World

- OPEC has cut oil production so the resulting shortage is driving up gasoline prices throughout the world
- Meanwhile increased consumer demand combined with a virus that has killed an unusual amount of pigs have pushed up the cost of bacon almost by 40%
- And then there's computer chips
 - Early this year we waited almost six months to get a new refrigerator freezer, because even modern refrigerators have computer chips in them
- And now there is a new shortage – CHRISTMAS TREES!
 - Last year when the pandemic was even worse than now and there were no vaccines, more people wanted the comfort of a Christmas tree in their home, and so many places overharvested their trees last year to satisfy the demand
 - Then this year, some areas that grow trees had way too much rain, and many young trees just died in the water-logged fields
 - So now there are higher prices or spot shortages of Christmas trees
- But these inconvenient shortages pale in comparison to the much more tragic death toll from the pandemic in the United States which has now reached over 775,000 people – that's more people than the population of Boston, or Denver, or Seattle... or closer to home, the American death toll is over 550 times the population of Schuylkill County
- Life is rough these days... and life was also rough in Jeremiah's day
 - In Jeremiah's lifetime the people of Judah living around Jerusalem had been forcibly removed from their homes, taken by the invading Babylonians as prisoners, and then sent into exile to become their slaves
 - The descendants of Abraham and Sarah became exiled slaves in a foreign and strange land, and meanwhile, in the words of Jeremiah, their homeland was a place of "waste, without human beings or animals [33:12]"
 - Yet there in the despair of exile and slavery, Jeremiah preached God's word of hope – in the midst of the rubble, in remembrance of a now abandoned and uninhabited land,

in the midst of their exile in faraway Babylon, God promised to raise up a fresh new sprig, God promised to raise up a new seedling, God promised to raise up a righteous branch from the ancient royal line of David, and unlike the weak and all-to-often unfaithful and cruel kings of the past centuries, this new, green, life-filled righteous branch would rule justly and rightly

- Sure enough, soon the exiled slaves were set free to return to their homeland to begin the long, hard process of rebuilding... and they would wait, and wait, and wait, until when several centuries later, God raised up the righteous branch – God took on flesh, God was born into the world, and God in Jesus Christ proclaimed a kingdom of graceful forgiveness and mercy, compassion and justice, which not even death on the cross could thwart or defeat
- In the midst of this Covid pandemic, we need to hear the assurance that God was faithful in the past to the exiles, Jesus Christ proclaimed the kingdom of God, and now we have been called into lives of discipleship as followers of the crucified and risen Lord
- Make no mistake, life IS hard these days
 - This pandemic is more stubborn than the Spanish flu of the early 20th century, it is more deadly than annual flu season, and in frustration and anger, people are venting their rage at clerks in stores, at other drivers, and tragically at spouses and children
 - Yet we – we who probably all have had angry and frustrating moments over the past almost two years – we are called to remember that time and time again God has been and continues to be faithful, that God has been and continues to be steadfast, and that God has brought and continues to bring hope into a creation and humanity that so badly needs it
 - In addition to the raging anger and the shortages that grab headlines and attention, there has been a less noticed, but much sadder indication of despair
 - Giving reasons like climate change, and the pandemic throughout the world, now nearly half of people

approaching child-bearing age in the United States say that they don't want to have children

- Their view of the future is one of childlessness by choice, because they see the world as such a terrible place raise kids
- This is a sign of hopelessness, a sign of despair, and a sadness that has been virulently spreading alongside the Covid virus
- But we, the church, have something to say to anger, rage, and hopelessness
- What we have to say is not a glib or easy answer, or just a cheery, shallow optimism
- We dare to share the Good News that God has already raised up a life-filled righteous brand out of the very grave of death, and that makes all the difference

• People of God, we have been entrusted with the promise of hope in Jesus Christ. Even when Christmas trees are in short supply God has raised up a righteous branch, even when anger rages in the world the God of creation is compassionate and continues to give signs of hope in trouble times, and even when hope seems dim or lost day after day we can tell the world and its people that Jesus himself has also endured suffering... but Jesus also was raised up and shares freely and abundantly the gift of hope and life not only with us, but with the world