

**Ezekiel 17:22-4 (Third Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 6—Series B)**

**“God’s Plan of Salvation is For You”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**June 13, 2021**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Old Testament reading recorded in Ezekiel 17:

<sup>22</sup>Thus says the Lord Yahweh, “I myself will take from the high top of the cedar and I will set it out. From the topmost of its shoots, I will pluck a tender sprig and I myself will plant it upon a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup>On the high mountain of Israel I will plant it. And it will produce branches and bear fruit and it will become a majestic cedar. And every kind of bird will live under it. In the shelter of its branches they will nest. <sup>24</sup>And all the trees of the countryside will know that I, Yahweh, bring low the high tree and exalt the low tree, I make withered the green tree and I make the withered tree blossom. I, Yahweh, have spoken and I will do it.”

Comedian Jeff Foxworthy is well known for his, “You might be a redneck” jokes. For example, “If fewer than half of the cars on your lawn run, you might be a redneck.” Or “If going to the bathroom at night involves shoes and a flashlight, you might be a redneck.” And “If you consider a bug-zapper high-quality entertainment, you might be a redneck.”

Now, let me play a variation on this theme for you this morning. If you believe that God created the world and then left it alone, you might be a deist. If you believe that God has no desire or need for worship or other specific behavior on the part of followers, you might be a deist. If you believe that God is not involved in flesh-and-blood history because of His indifference to human affairs and because of His weakness, you might be a deist. Some deists that you might know the names of include Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and John Adams. According to the most recent American Religious Identification Survey from 2001, deism between 1990 and 2001 grew at a rate of 717 percent. So if you believe that God doesn’t care about the world He created, isn’t

interested in your well-being or salvation, and is too weak to be in control of history, you might be a deist.

Radically different from deism is the revelation of Holy Scripture about God the Creator being intimately involved with His creation and in the flesh-and-blood history of that creation. Very clearly in the pages of the Old and New Testaments do we see that God is certainly not indifferent. He is not an impotent or puny god. He is the God who is doing! He is the God who has the plan to save humanity from the power of sin, death, and hell and He is the God who accomplishes that plan in His ways, and His ways are different from ours.

What God first promised in Genesis 3:15, that the Descendent of Eve would one day crush the head of that ancient snake, Satan, is carried through the pages of Holy Scripture as the promise is revealed and more details are filled in throughout the course of world history. God's promises to folks like Abraham and David were not the result of some new or clever human plans. What God accomplished for the salvation of humanity is solely the new and free actions of God in faithfulness to His ancient promises: "I, Yahweh, have spoken and I will do it." Sounds very much like the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

And what God does for the blessing and benefit of humanity doesn't always match up with the way that we would like to see things done. Have you ever thought to yourself, "Well, if I was God, I'd do it like this . . ."? Take Jonah, for example. He had zero interest in going to Nineveh to tell the Assyrians that God was angry over their sins and that they ought to repent and trust in His forgiveness, and if not, God would punish them with destruction. You remember his sermon, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed." "And the people of

Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.' When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it" (Jonah 3:5–10 ESV).

God's plan is to bring salvation in the forgiveness of sins to all people. His plan here involved the reluctant prophet, Jonah. And God's ways didn't suit Jonah's ways at all. "[Jonah] was angry. And he prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live'" (Jonah 4:1–3 ESV). All this is to say, "God, I wanted you to destroy those wicked, sinful Assyrians! I'm so mad you forgave them!"

God's plan of salvation and how He accomplishes it doesn't always suit us. His ways of justice and mercy don't always fit with ours. We'd be very happy if God were to simply punish the wicked, that they would really get what they deserve in this life. Maybe like Jesus' disciples James and John we want to take matters into our own hands and say, "Lord, do you

want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54 ESV). And when earthly justice is not rendered, or when earthly life doesn't go the way that we had planned, or when you don't get the answer to your prayers that you wanted, we get mad at God. We tell God that He's out of His ever-living mind not to see things our way. We tell God that what He does in our lives and in the lives of those we love should make sense to us because we should be able to understand it all. And then He hits us with Isaiah 55, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD" (Is. 55:8 ESV). We hear the Word of God through St. Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom. 11:33 ESV). Of course, the Lord could just show up in a whirlwind as He did to Job when Job wasn't getting things done according to the way he wanted. God said, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:2–4 ESV). And Job's humbled response, "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. . . . I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (Job 40:4; 42:3 ESV).

God asked through His prophet Jeremiah, "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?" (Jer. 23:23 ESV). He's not aloof or uncaring. God has not abandoned His creation or you. He has always been involved in flesh-and-blood history, working out His plan of salvation for all people who need the rescue from sin and death. But He does not act according to our ways or thoughts. He is the God who takes a mere broken-

off sprig from top of a cedar tree to start with. He plants it in an unlikely place, on a mountain top. And can you believe it? It grows into something huge, lofty, splendid, fruitful, and protective. This is God's work, God's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Ps 118:23).

So what is God doing exactly? "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD" (Is. 11:1–2 ESV). "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness'" (Jer. 23:5–6 ESV).

We have here in the text of Ezekiel a vivid, poetic expression of the salvation that God provides through the humiliation of His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the sprig from the top of the cedar. He is the shoot of Jesse, David's righteous Branch. Jesus, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Consider the imagery that Ezekiel gives us that helps us to visualize God's plan of salvation coming together in the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, "For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men" (Is. 53:2–3 ESV).

And this Despised One was planted on a mountain, Calvary; nailed to a tree, the cross; to bear humanity's sins as His own, to suffer death and hell in the place of all people, so that

everyone might receive from His holy, precious blood complete forgiveness and everlasting life. Like a shoot grows, bears fruit, and shelters the birds, Jesus the Son of God took on human flesh. He was born as a helpless infant and grew in favor with God and people. Hanging on a cross, forsaken by God the Father, Jesus shed His blood in order to bear fruit. He was lifted up, drawing all people to Himself in order to bestow on them the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life by grace through faith. All who believe and trust in Him as their Savior abide in the shade of the tree of the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus lives and is now exalted. He is like a majestic cedar in which we can all find comfort, peace, and rest because of the forgiveness of sins He won and has given to us through the Gospel.

This is God's plan of salvation. He Himself accomplished this for you through the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that you are forgiven. Eternal life is yours as the Savior's free gift to you through faith. What's more, this means that Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is with you always, just as He promised, through the power and grace of God the Holy Spirit. When earthly justice isn't given, when your life doesn't go the way that you had planned, or when you don't get the answer to your prayers that you wanted, know that you are still under the care and protection of the God who is intimately involved in history, in your history and life. His ways are not your ways. His plans are not your plans. His are better. His are wiser. And they are all being worked out for you according to the riches of God's grace for you in Christ Jesus. The Lord has promised. He has spoken His promises to you through the Word, Jesus Christ. He will surely do it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.