

Jer. 33:14–16

Ps. 25:1–10

1 Thess. 3:9–13

Luke 21:25–36

Righteous Branch

Goal for the Session

Third- and fourth-graders will explore Jeremiah’s words about God’s promises and grow in understanding what it means to have hope in God’s ways.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Jeremiah 33:14–16

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Angela Bauer-Levesque

Opening with a formula typical of salvation oracles, “the days are surely coming,” verse 14 introduces divine first-person speech. God is assuring the audience that God will fulfill “the promise,” literally “the good word” with a definite article—not “a” promise, one of many, but a particular one made to both the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Harkening back to Jeremiah 23:5–6, another eschatological interlude, verse 15 reiterates what was promised there, namely, that God will birth a “righteous” (*tsedaqah*) offspring of the Davidic monarchy, who will act in ways that will promote “justice and righteousness” (*mishpat* and *tsedaqah*).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Jennifer Ryan Ayres

Here we meet the God who promises to protect and restore the people, even as they are in the midst of great suffering and at the edge of despair. It is in precisely this context that God speaks the promise, and it is in precisely this context that despair opens the door to creativity and hope. Calvin acknowledged that the promises of God seem to disappear, but that with faith and patience, we look forward to their fulfillment.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Deborah A. Block

This text insists that covenantal life in all its expressions is characterized by justice and righteousness, allowing no dichotomy of “prophetic” and “pastoral.” Life together is to embody the nature of God, “The LORD is our righteousness.” Jeremiah uses the name first for a promised person (23:6) and again here, intentionally, for a promised place (33:16). The vision of the time to come impugns the time at hand. What leader and what community could claim “The LORD is our righteousness”? The promise challenges our reality, and drives a reappropriation of “righteousness.” The word is uncommon, if not pejorative, in common parlance and unwelcome in the lexicon of many faithful because of its frequent companionship with “self.”

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Gary W. Charles

As I listen to the cries of Jeremiah throughout the scope of his prophecy, I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future will be a reality beyond the violent boasts of the ruling Babylon of the day. I long for the day that is surely coming when in God’s future the poor are not sent to shelters or forced to sleep on the streets. I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future has no space for violence, when we will stop producing body bags—because there are no dead soldiers to fill them. I long for the day that is surely coming when God’s future affords no room for rancor, a day when our world is no longer torn asunder by racism and sexism and homophobia.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 33:14–16

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth or place mat
- 4 battery-powered votive candles in holders
- Color Pack 1, 2, 38
- Bible
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast

For Responding

- option 1: Color Pack 38; Advent candles; *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- option 2: wall calendar, copies of Resource Sheet 2 on light green paper, green and brown construction paper, tape, scissors
- option 3: Color Pack 3, scissors

Some churches use the color blue in worship during Advent as a symbol of hope. Some churches use purple, a color of royalty, to honor the coming of our king, Jesus. In your class, use the same color your church uses in worship.

Focus on Your Teaching

Children are keenly aware that promises are often broken. Whether they feel guilty for having broken a promise or have been hurt by someone who did not keep a promise to them, children know the power of a promise. On this first Sunday of Advent, Christians remember God's promises and look forward to their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. As you teach this season, affirm that God keeps promises. Express your own faith that while much is uncertain in our world, we can trust God.

Loving God, when the events of this world make little sense, help me to grow in trusting your ways. Fill me with hope that overflows as I speak your words of comfort to these children. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, plan to use the same color cloth or place mat that your church uses in worship during Advent. (See the sidebar.) If you are using option 2 in Responding, cut one 9" x 3" piece of brown construction paper for each child. If you are using option 3, cut apart the stories on Color Pack 3.

Greet learners as they arrive. Ask them to place the blue or purple cloth or place mat in the center of your learning space and arrange four votive candles in a circle on it. Show Color Pack 1 and explain that today is the beginning of the church year season called Advent. There are four candles because there are four Sundays in this season. During Advent, Christians give thanks for God's promises and prepare to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Invite learners to sing "Dona Nobis Pacem" (Color Pack 38, *Singing the Feast*) as you light one candle. After the song, pray aloud:

Dear God, like light in darkness, your promises give us hope! Be with us and guide us as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

Invite learners to tell about times that another person kept a promise to them. Discuss:

- ✪ When have you kept a promise you made? When have you broken a promise you made?
- ✪ Why are promises sometimes so difficult or even impossible for people to keep?

Tell learners that today's Bible reading is about God's promises.

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona nobis pacem, pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

Justice: Providing fair and/or equal treatment of all people.

EXPLORING

Show a Bible opened to Jeremiah 33 and say that this is where today's Bible reading is found. The book of Jeremiah is in the Old Testament, the part of the Bible that tells about God's people before Jesus was born.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (God's Promise). Tell learners to follow along as you read the parts for Reader. Ask learners to read the parts for All in unison. Afterward, discuss the story, encouraging learners to refer to the resource sheet to help them find answers:

- ✠ Why were God's people living in Babylon? What had happened to Jerusalem?
- ✠ How do you think God's people felt when they were living in Babylon?
- ✠ While they were living in Babylon, what are some things that God's people forgot?
- ✠ What did God tell Jeremiah to do?
- ✠ What promises did God make?
- ✠ Do you think God's promises helped God's people to have hope? Why or why not?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud verse 15 on the resource sheet. Explain that when Christians hear these words, they often think of God's Son, Jesus. Review how the church celebrated Christ the King (Reign of Christ) Sunday last week and what kind of king Jesus is. Ask:

- ✠ What does the word *justice* mean?
- ✠ What does it mean to "rule with justice" (v. 15, CEV)?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud verse 16 on the resource sheet. Explain that during the season of Advent, Christians remember God's promises to make the world a fair and peaceful place and look forward to the day when God's work will be finished.

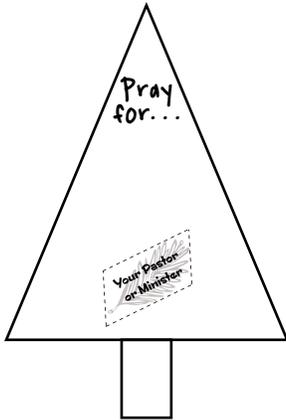
- ✠ In what ways do you see God's promise of a world of peace and justice being kept?
What work still needs to be done?
- ✠ How might you help with God's work of peace and justice?
- ✠ What gives you hope in God's promises?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

**EASY
PREP**

1. **Grant Us Peace** Learners will sing and pray for a world of fairness and peace. Gather around the Advent candles with learners. Display Color Pack 38 to review the song "Dona Nobis Pacem" ([*Singing the Feast*](#)). Review the meaning of "grant us peace." Consider how these words are a prayer. Invite learners to name people or situations that are in need of fairness and peace. Dim the lights, if possible, and light one candle. Invite learners to sing "Dona Nobis Pacem" softly and prayerfully. Sing it several times, pausing between repetitions for learners to voice prayers for the people and situations named. Invite them to think quietly about the hope that comes from knowing that God hears their prayers. Extinguish the candle.



If you have a large class, form groups of three or four. If you have a small class, have each pair plan more than one role play.

2. Advent Prayer Tree Learners will make a reminder to pray for people in need of God's fairness and peace as they count down the days to Christmas. Show a wall calendar and ask learners to count the number of days until Christmas. Suggest they can offer hope to others by praying each day during Advent. Distribute green construction paper, scissors, and markers. Have them cut off two corners to create a treelike triangle shape and print "Pray for . . ." at the very top of the triangle. Give each one a 9" x 3" piece of brown construction paper to tape to the bottom as a trunk. Have them fold the trunk in half to form a "pocket" and tape the two sides. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Advent Prayer Tree) and have learners cut apart the pieces and place them in the pocket. Invite each child to pick one piece, tape it to the tree, and offer a silent prayer. Encourage them to draw one piece each day, pray, and then tape it to the tree. Save the star for Christmas Day.

3. Role Play Learners will role-play situations to illustrate ways of living out God's promise of a fair and peaceful world. Form pairs and have each pair draw a story cut from Color Pack 3. Direct each pair to think of a solution to the situation that would reflect or bring to life God's promise of peace and fairness, and then plan how to role-play both the situation and the solution. After each group performs its role play, thank them with applause. Discuss how our actions can help others to have hope and to learn more about God's ways of justice and peace.

CLOSING

Gather with learners around the Advent candles and light one. Invite learners to tell about what helps them to have hope in God's promises.

Explain that you will close with a circle blessing. Begin by turning to the child on your left and saying: "(Name), God bless you. Have hope this Advent season." This child then blesses the child on his or her left, and so on.

Thank learners for coming and tell them you are looking forward to seeing them next week.

God's Promise

Reader: Long ago, an army captured Jerusalem and destroyed the buildings in the city. The soldiers forced God's people to walk to Babylon and live there. The Jewish people missed their homes and the temple in Jerusalem. They wondered if God had forgotten about them. (Pause to trace the route on Color Pack 2.)

All: But God had not forgotten.

Reader: God's people settled into Babylon. They planted gardens. They raised families. As the years went by, God's people began to forget to live in God's ways.

All: But God had not forgotten.

Reader: While the people had once remembered Moses and the Law, many had forgotten. While the people had once remembered how to worship God in the temple, many had forgotten. While the people had once remembered how to live in God's fair and just ways, many had forgotten.

All: But God had not forgotten.

Reader: God called to the prophet Jeremiah. God said, "I have not forgotten my people. Speak my words to them."

All: And Jeremiah spoke God's word to the people:

¹⁴The LORD said: I made a wonderful promise to Israel and Judah, and the days are coming when I will keep it.

¹⁵I promise that the time will come when I will appoint a king from the family of David, a king who will be honest and rule with justice.

¹⁶In those days, Judah will be safe; Jerusalem will have peace and will be named, "The LORD Gives Justice." (Jeremiah 33:14–16, CEV)



Advent Prayer Tree



Peace in the World	A Friend	A Family Member	Your Church
Someone Who Is Sick	Someone Who Is Sad	Someone Who Is Lonely	People Who Are Hungry
Someone Who Needs Help	A Friend	A Family Member	Your Sunday School Class
Someone Who Is Sick	Someone Who Is Sad	Someone Who Is Lonely	People Who Are Hungry
Our Nation's Leaders	Firefighters	Police Officers	Veterans
A Neighbor	Doctors and Nurses	People Who Have No Home	Refugees
Your Pastor or Minister	Your Teacher		

