**1st Sunday in Advent – Year C – December 2, 2012 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Jeremiah 33:14-16 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**“Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”**

*14 “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. 15 “‘In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which she will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’” (NIV)*

Hello! My name is Jeremiah, what’s your name? Do you know what your name means? Jeremiah is a Hebrew name and it means “the LORD throws.” The LORD certainly hurled this prophet into a hostile world and into a difficult ministry.

I worked during the rule of King Zedekiah. His name means “the LORD is my righteousness.” You would think this would be a good king to work for. I tell you, he did not live as if the LORD was his righteousness. Here’s an excerpt from the Bible, “He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.” (2Chronicles 36:12-14)

You would think the people should have known better. The LORD called them his chosen people, his chosen nation, for the sole purpose of producing the Messiah, the Christ, who would save the world from its sin. You would think the people of god would act that way – as God’s children – but they didn’t. Instead they followed the king and did all the things the other nations did – they worshiped other gods.

God looked down from heaven, as a father watching his children, and saw they were disobedient. As a father doles out consequences for a child’s poor choices, the Father in heaven was going to discipline his children Israel. My ministry was to warn the people that they had sinned. The consequence was discipline. They needed to repent! But they didn’t. And so the LORD sent the Babylonian army and they destroyed Jerusalem and deported the people into exile. They did not live up to their name. But that’s enough from me right now…

Hello! My name is Paul. What is your name? In Jesus’ day fathers named their baby boys eight days after they were born, on the day their sons were circumcised. This was a special sign that they belonged to the LORD. Not too long ago babies were named on the day of their baptism. Did you know that when you were baptized Jesus gave you a new name, too? This is the name, “the LORD our Righteousness.” This means Jesus’ name is your name. His righteousness, that is, his life of sinlessness, his innocent death are all yours. His name is your name. You are a child of God, a child who belongs to God, and that’s how you will live. But I have to be honest with you. There are some days that I remove that nametag and wear another one.

Like when I hang out with friends, coworkers and people in the community. I do the things they do. I say the things they say. I wear a nametag that says, “I am child of this sinful world.” Because I don’t want to be labeled “uncool.”

Sometimes I try on another nametag, it says, “Hello! I’m better than you are!” When I wear this nametag, I feel better about myself. I like to be critical and judgmental of others so I look better than others. I pick at their faults and I look pretty good. What’s worse is that I do this, this comparison game, not just with out of control celebrities or corrupt world leaders, but with my own children, my spouse, my friends, my church family.

This is the problem when I wear this nametag. Too often I do not look at my church family, my spouse, my children, as God looks at them. He sees them as his children, baptized children of God, who have Jesus’ righteousness. I think we would have more peace, unity, harmony in our congregations and in our homes, if we saw each other as God sees us. But sadly, too often we wear the nametag, “Hello! I’m better than you are!”

You know what that does to the children of God, these people whom God considers righteous? They despair! When I’m on the receiving end, when other Christians, whose name tags say, “The LORD our Righteousness”, don’t look at me and treat me the way God sees me, it’s downright depressing. It does not strengthen me but tears me down. When all we do is complain and criticize, when that’s all that comes from our lips, what does that do to others? It makes you look better, but what does it do to others? They despair.

God allows us to suffer the consequences for our actions, too, doesn’t he? He did it to his people Israel, he does to us, too. God allows temporary discipline to shake us up, so we repent. What are some natural consequences when we wear nametags that say, “Hello, my name is I’m better than you”? Not only do I ruin my reputation, but also I ruin the good name of others. When we wear the nametag, “Hello, I’m a child of this sinful world,” could it be that we give Jesus a bad name and we blaspheme the Word of God, and by our actions we say that sin doesn’t matter, that Christ’s righteousness gives me a license to sin. Too often I throw away the nametag that the LORD has so graciously given me and replace it with what I want to be and what I want to say at that moment.

I don’t know about you, but this makes me fall down on my knees in sorrow. I have sinned… not only against my brothers and sisters in Christ, but more importantly, against my God and Father in heaven. I have not lived up to my name - the name God has given me. I have lived the way I want to. That’s what the Advent season is for - to remind me that our King is coming. When he comes he will bring judgment, and with judgment punishment. Not discipline, but punishment.

But he does not punish us. He punished his Son, Jesus, even though he did not deserve to be punished. But enough from me for now…

Hello! My name is Jesus, the Christ. Christ is my title. It means “anointed one.” In my day, kings and prophets and priests had oil poured over their heads as a sign that they were set them apart as special for their special work to the LORD. I was anointed by my Father with the Holy Spirit to do his special work – to save. That’s what my name means.

The name the angel gave to my mother Mary – Jesus – means “he saves.” Save whom? Save you! Save you from punishment you deserve for your unfaithfulness. My prophet Jeremiah prophesied about me and said that I will do “**what is just and right in the land**.” That’s what I did to save you from punishment. I could have made a name for myself during my ministry. I could have been so critical and judgmental of people because I was perfect! I could have worn that nametag “I’m better than you.” But I didn’t. It didn’t even cross my mind. In humility I saw people for what they were… sinners… sinners in desperate need of a Savior. I am had come to save them from their sins. And when people treated me unfairly, I did not despair. I kept moving forward, trusting in my Father to keep me strong. That’s righteous living. I lived that way to keep the Father from punishing you.

In the ultimate act of love and humility I went to the cross in order to be punished for your sins even though I was innocent. I took the blame for your sins – your gossip, your complaining, your better-than-thou attitudes – I was punished in your place. Because I saw you needed a Savior… because of my great love for you… but enough from me for now…

Hello, it’s me, Jeremiah again. Let me explain what this means for you. Jesus was righteous in every way – in his life and his death. Because Jesus is Righteousness I could say to the people of Israel, **“In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which she will be called: the LORD our Righteousness.”** Did you hear that? “The name by which *she* will be called.” I was talking about the people in Judah and Jerusalem. They will be called “the LORD our Righteousness.” I was talking about you. You are the people of Judah and Jerusalem. You are the true nation of Israel because Jesus put his name on you through holy baptism.

It’s kind of like a nice young woman who gets married to the love of her life and she takes the last name of her husband. In a sense she is no longer part of her mom and dad’s household. She and her husband are one in marriage and have a new household together, and a new name, and new life. Jesus talks about your relationship with him in the same way. Jesus married himself to you. You are his. When you were baptized Jesus gave you his name, “the LORD our righteousness.” Everything he did for you, his righteous life, his innocent death, his glorious resurrection from the dead, became yours. In a sense, your name tag no longer says, “Hello, my name is better than you,” or, “Hello, my name is sinner,” in fact my name tag no longer says, “Jeremiah,” it says, “Hello, my name is the LORD our righteousness.”

And that’s how God sees you, too. When he looks at you he doesn’t see Paul, the unfaithful sinner. He sees Jesus, the faithful and righteous one. And that’s good. Your pastor told me you’re in the season of Advent right now. You focus on the coming of Jesus, in flesh as a baby in Bethlehem, but more importantly, you focus on Jesus’ coming as king and judge. When Jesus comes as the judge, and you have to stand before the judge, it’s good. Because he sees Jesus Christ. His name and his righteousness have been imputed to you. You wear the title of Christ, that is who you are, in Christ Jesus, and Jesus in you, through faith in Jesus. For those who continue to believe in Jesus – as I said to the people of Judah – **you will be saved, you will live in safety**, for eternity in heaven. But that’s enough from me for now…

Hello, it’s Paul again. I take that back, my name is “the LORD our righteousness.” And hey, look at that! You have the same name tag! That’s how I am going to see you, talk to you, behave around you, talk about you when you’re not around, the way God sees you, as “the LORD our righteousness.” And when I don’t, could you kindly point it out to me, so that I may repent? And then could you point me back to Jesus, and show me how beautiful he is, that he is my righteousness? When I appear to wear the nametag, “I’m a child of this sinful world,” could you please point that out to me, so that I might repent? And then could you please point me back to Jesus and show me that his righteousness is my righteousness? When he disciplines me because of my poor choices, please let me know, and turn me back to Jesus, to see how wonderful his righteousness is? Thanks. I’ll do the same for you. Amen.