

**Third Sunday in Advent – December 13, 2015**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Zephaniah 3:14-18**

**Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 15) The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. 16) On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 17) The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

Dear friends in Christ:

“If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands.” We often respond to happy occasions with songs and cheers. When a sports team is about to conclude a championship season – the fans sing, “We are the champions.” And think of the many happy songs we sing this time of year including Joy to the World.

Advent is indeed a festive season of the church year – filled with joyful songs. In fact, our text for today reminds us of that fact as it outlines for us reasons for rejoicing.

**It’s time to rejoice and sing.**

- 1. The Lord has great power to save**
- 2. The Lord has overcome every enemy**
- 3. The Lord shadows us with his love**

These words of this text are addressed to those whom the Lord has saved – they are called the daughters of Zion, Israel and daughters of Jerusalem. I think it would be safe to say that the book of Zephaniah is one that may not be very familiar to us – certainly not as familiar as some of the other books of the Bible. It’s a rather short book with a rather simple but timeless message concerning the Lord’s judgment. Although Zephaniah pictures the Lord’s judgment as an ongoing process throughout history, he also speaks of a final day of judgment. This day is pictured as a day of wrath for both the faithless hypocrites among God’s people and the unbelieving and idolatrous heathen people of the world. They will have only the Lord’s anger and punishment to look forward to on that day. However, Zechariah also pictures this day as a day of rescue and deliverance for the faithful – reminding them: **The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save.**

The portion of Zephaniah’s prophecy from which our text is taken emphasizes the bright prospect of deliverance from God’s people as he urges the Lord’s people to sing, to shout aloud, to be glad, and to rejoice with all their hearts in the safety the Lord promises to them. The tone of our text is obvious, isn’t it? If one were to think of the book of Zephaniah as a musical composition this would be the part where the cymbals would be crashing and the melody would be all-upbeat. As Christians living in an increasingly godless society which seems to grow farther and farther away from God’s will with each passing year we have many reasons to be concerned. When many of the religious among us seem to be missing the point of Christ’s birth and seem to ignore him as the only way, the only truth, and the only light who provides eternal life it’s important to be reminded that our Lord is with us – that he is mighty to save. There is reason for us to upbeat! Indeed, we have reasons to rejoice and sing because the Lord has great power to save.

Our text speaks of that great power as it assures us that the Lord has overcome every enemy. **The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.**

Scripture tells us the wages of sin is death. This is what the Lord has swept away for us. He's put it out of sight never to be seen again. If the punishment is swept away and if the enemy of death has been removed – then the sin and guilt is no longer a problem for us either. All of these things are unable to harm us.

Zephaniah's words build on the rest of Scripture as they remind us: **The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.** Isaiah spoke of the Lord as the suffering servant who **was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brings us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed.** The punishment our sins called for was placed on Christ. Now the Lord himself makes a covenant with us as Jeremiah explained, **I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.**

In his mercy, Christ died for the sins of the world removing the terrible consequences of hell – undoing the work of Satan and rendering him powerless. Death and hell are no longer a threat to the one who clings to Christ in faith – they have been taken away and turned back as Zephaniah put it. If we're willing to break into song when a basketball team clinches a victory – surely we can understand why our text urges us to sing, shout aloud, be glad and rejoice.

Once our sin has been removed, it is possible once again for the Lord himself to come and be with his people. The holy God hates sin – Isaiah reminded us: **Your iniquities have separated you from your God.** God will not dwell with a sinful people but now that sin is forgiven and Christ the Lord has removed our guilt there's no reason for the Lord to stay separated from his people any longer. So Zephaniah assures us, **The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you.**

He's with us protecting us from harm and danger, delivering us from evil, comforting us in times of uncertainty and distress, dispelling our doubts and uncertainties. **"Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp."** Fear has a way of paralyzing a person so that they can't even move. But for us those days of fear and not being able to move are over. The Lord who has removed our fears by conquering our enemies has empowered our limp hands and arms so we no longer are forced to just stand there! Now we can clap our hands but even more importantly, we can use our hands in service to the one who has set us free!

Now that the Lord has set us free from all our enemies and dwells with us we can be assured that the Lord will shadow us with his love. The psalmist put it this way: (Psalms 23:4-6) **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6) Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.** Our text says it almost as beautifully: **The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."**

Our text began by picturing the Lord as a mighty warrior who had conquered all of enemies. This strong mighty warrior also has a tender side – in fact, it was his great love and compassion that compelled him to take our place and to defeat sin and death for us. These words of our text remind us of the way a mother shadows her child with love.

When young children and infants find themselves in strange and unfamiliar surroundings they need to feel and experience the strength and love of their parents. One of the ways parents comfort their children is by singing to them. A number of years ago I was traveling with a group of parents all with tiny babies. One of the little babies in the group began to fuss. Her family included an older sister (maybe a first grader) who looked up at her mom and said, "You're not going to sing here are you?" I couldn't help but chuckle as the mom

explained that she never used to sing at all especially in public but that now she didn't care who heard her. She knew the singing would have a calming effect on her daughters.

In a very real way each and every one of us are like little children who need to learn of their parents love and security and to experience that love and security. We were born sinful – outside the family of God. The apostle Paul reminds us that in his great love for us God predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ. In baptism we are brought into the family of God as our sins are washed away. Yet we still have remnants of our sinful flesh clinging to us. We have memories and reminders of our life outside of the family of God. Our sins fill us with fear and concern. We need to experience the love of our heavenly father. We need to be reminded of his delight in us and his love for us. And that's just what Zephaniah does in our text as he assures us that the Lord will quiet us with his love.

When our fears, our stresses, our daily tasks begin to overwhelm us – the Lord quiets us with his love saying – **be still and know that I am God.** That's a comforting thought isn't it when we consider all of the turmoil in our lives and our world. It was centuries ago when the Psalmist first penned the words of Psalm 46 but the comfort they offer is timeless. **Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.**

It's normal for parents to be delighted about the accomplishments of their children. But have we ever pictured God looking us with delight in the same we take delight in the first words, first steps, and other accomplishments of our children. And just as parents pride and delight in their children continues no matter how old those children might be so the Lord will continue to be delighted with those who are his children through faith in Christ Jesus. Once again the Psalmist expands upon Zephaniah's thoughts: (Psalms 149:1-5) **Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. 2) Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. 3) Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. 4) For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. 5) Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds.**

It is indeed an honor for us to enjoy the love of our Savior God. It fills us with joy and singing as he quiets us with his love. But it's not just the believers who sing – Zephaniah tells us that the Lord will rejoice over us with singing. Have you ever pictured God as a loving Father singing Hush little baby don't you cry or Jesus love me this I know to a little child? Perhaps not but isn't a comforting picture? And doesn't it become even more comforting when you see yourself safe in the hands of that loving Father who is rejoicing over you with his songs!

Our text for today may not have been among the most familiar sections of Scripture but I hope that the pictures it has of God and his love for you might become some of your favorites as they serve as reminders that no matter what is going on in your life:

**It's time to rejoice and sing.**

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- 2. The Lord has overcome every enemy**
- 3. The Lord shadows us with his love**

Amen.