

Joy in the Presence of God

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Introduction

In this third week of Advent, our focus is on joy. As Christmas approaches, many people feel joy. Even some non-Christians celebrate Christmas and get caught up in the “Christmas spirit”, which is a spirit of joy. But, not understanding what it’s all about, their joy is just a fleeting emotion that comes and goes with the season. While we focus on joy today, our joy is not only for today or the Advent/Christmas season. The joy we are talking about is not a feeling, but an attitude, a lifestyle. The source of that joy is God.

Not Hollow

Do you remember the song *Don't Worry, Be Happy*? That’s not what Zephaniah is saying to Israel, and ultimately to us. He’s not telling Israel to cheer up. He’s not asking them to ignore their situation. His call to rejoice is a call to change perspective. He gives them reason to rejoice, by reminding them of what God has done for them, and letting them know what He is doing now, and what He will do.

What God Has Done

Zephaniah reminds Israel that God has taken away the judgments against them and cleared away their enemies. He has done the same for us. Through Christ’s atoning death on the cross, God has taken away the punishment we deserve for our sin. He has forgiven our sins and removed our guilt. Covered in Christ’s blood, we stand before the judgment seat of God clothed in His righteousness. Through His death and resurrection, Christ has defeated all our enemies—sin, death, and the devil. After D-Day, most historians agree that the Nazis had lost the war. Even though they kept fighting for nearly a year, their fate was sealed. In the same way, even though they keep attacking us, the fate of our enemies has been sealed since the death and resurrection of Jesus. This means that no matter how bad things get, we can rejoice because we know what the inevitable outcome will be. We win!

What God Is Doing

God’s love for us is complete and amazing. He rejoices and exults over us. I imagine Him saying to the angels, “Here, let me show you a picture of my kids.” His love is so amazing, that as it was pointed out in Bible study last week, God knows us better than we know ourselves, yet He still loves us. He quiets us with His love by wrapping His arms around us and soothing our fears. He rejoices over us so we can rejoice over Him.

What God Will Do

God will take us home. This world is not our home. We are merely pilgrims here. We were created to live with God, to share in the dance of the Trinity. When our time on earth is ended, God will take us home where we belong. I don’t know about you, but when I’ve been away from home for a long time, I say with Dorothy, “There’s no place like home.” There’s no place like our heavenly home, either.

Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us. He did that by going to the cross and dying in our place. Through His death, He has prepared us to go home with Him.

Restoration

(Read **1 Corinthians 15:50-53**) To take us to be with Him, God will change us, restore us to the people we were meant to be. We will have a glorified body like Jesus did when He rose from the dead. *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).*

Emmanuel

Maybe the biggest reason to rejoice is that God is with us. That's what Advent is all about. Through the Incarnation, God has come down to be with us in everyday life. God has always been with His people. When He led the children of Israel through the wilderness, he was with them in a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. He dwelt over the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. He became one of us and was born in a manger to be Emmanuel, God with us. Today, He is with us in His Word. And He is with us bodily as we receive the Sacrament of the Altar. Receive His body and blood and **REJOICE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.**

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
