

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Daggett and St. Mark Lutheran Church, Wallace, Michigan
The Third Sunday in Advent
December 13
Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 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. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 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."

Did any of you see or hear about the headline which appeared in the New York Daily news last week? The headline proudly declared, "God Isn't Fixing This" with pictures of Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, Paul Ryan and Lindsey Graham mentioning they were praying for the victims in San Bernardino. The words at the bottom of the page taunt the politicians and call them cowards because they are praying for the people rather than working to get guns off of the street or working to keep them out of the hands of bad guys.

The headline was designed to get a reaction and sell more newspapers, but I think it perfectly illustrates the way unbelievers react when bad things happen in this world. They don't understand the reason these things keep happening and it seems they keep happening more and more. San Bernardino, Paris, a college in Oregon, Newtown, Connecticut and Columbine. The names roll off of the tongue and hurt the heart when you think about them because they make no sense.

The lack of understanding leads the unbeliever to cry out, "Why? Why do these things keep happening? Why do innocent people keep dying? It makes no sense." These acts leave them hurt, confused and angry with God. This anger leads to an attack against God. God can't or won't keep us safe, but I can. I'll pass the right laws, get guns off of the streets, I'll do thing x and then there would be no more violence. No more mass shootings.

This thinking is the hope and dream of a lot of unbelievers, but it misses one key fact. The bad things keep happening. They won't stop. Why won't they stop? It isn't because we don't have the right laws in place. The bad things happen because we live in a sinful and fallen world. Things are getting worse all the time and they aren't going to get better. We can try and pass all the laws we want, but terrible things will keep happening in our world.

This is the reality of the world which we live in and it can be quite depressing. Yet, what message do we hear Zephaniah telling us today? **"Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 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."**

"On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 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.'" Zephaniah's message is quite jarring compared to our world which we live in. The world we live in is filled with bad things, but Zephaniah doesn't want us to be down in the dumps. He wants us to sing to the Lord.

What am I missing here? Why should I sing in a world filled with so many bad things? Zephaniah knows the world is a dangerous place, but he still wants us to sing and shout with joy. Why? He wants us to sing because of the great God we have. This great God gives us reason to sing. We will look at three reasons why it is time to sing. It is time to sing because the Lord has conquered every enemy, he watches over us with his love and his great power saves us.

We will look at the first reason why it is time to sing. It is time to sing because the Lord has conquered every enemy. Zephaniah says, **"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." Zephaniah promises the Lord has turned back our enemies. This is a mild way of putting it. The words "turned back" can also be translated cleared away. The Lord has cleared our enemies away.

The fact the Lord has cleared away our enemies is a strong promise. It reminds us the Lord just isn't on the defensive and fighting off attacks against his church. It reminds us the Lord has gone on the offensive, brought the fight to our enemies and won. He didn't kind of defeat them and give them a chance to rise up again. He has completely wiped the floor with them and destroyed them. They have no chance or hope of winning because the Lord has cleared them away.

Yet, does a part of you ask, "How can you say this Zephaniah? Your world must have been safer than ours. You had it good. We have it bad." Is this true? It might be tempting to think this way, but think about Zephaniah's world. His country was in mortal danger. God's chosen people had turned their backs on him by worshipping other gods. It would take just a generation or two before God would carry out his judgment on Zephaniah's homeland and exile the people to Babylon. Was his world better than ours?

God was not happy with his people, but Zephaniah still sang, **"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."** He sang because he trusted his Lord had conquered all of his enemies and this is the reason we sing too. Our Lord has conquered all of our enemies. I know it doesn't feel like it at times since the world is a big and scary place. I get it, but our feelings can't trump facts.

The Lord is the king and ruler of this earth. Nothing in this world happens unless he allows it to happen. Sometimes bad things happen, but we need to remember it isn't God's fault. These things are reminders we live in a sinful world which is rebelling against its creator. God uses these things as wake up calls to remind us of this rebellion against him. Bad things will keep happening, but he is in control. He has defeated every single one of these enemies.

He is the conquering hero who is ruler of all, but we sing because this conquering hero watches over us with his love. **"On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 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.'"** Zephaniah promises this conquering hero has saved us.

This salvation is unlike any salvation known to man. It is more than saving us from a mass shooting. It is more than ending all terroristic threats. This salvation gives us the courage to face anything in this world. It allows us to face a big and scary world without fear because our Lord has delivered us from the worst thing which could ever happen to us in this world: death. Taking our life is the worst thing anyone in this world could ever do to us.

Satan uses the fear of death as an effective tool against us. He threatens and scares us with it. He tries to claim his power is greater than God's power. Satan makes these proud boasts, but Zephaniah reminds us the Jesus has saved us from death. He has defeated it by his own death. He has taken great delight in

us and moves to quiet us with the stillness of his strong love for us because the worst thing this world can do to us opens the doors of heaven to us.

This promise of salvation is what causes Zephaniah to sing and gives him the courage to face the dark days ahead. It is his message to us today and his encouragement for us to sing. **“Do not fear, O (members of St. Mark/Holy Cross); do not let your hands hang limp. 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.”**

Zephaniah promises the Lord our God is with us. He is right beside us in this big, bad and scary world. He knows what is going on, he knows what we are going through and he promises to sustain us because he takes delight in us and rejoices over us. Aren't these good reasons to sing? Yes, these are wonderful reasons to sing and this is exactly what Zephaniah urges us to do. **“Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!”**

Zephaniah's heart is bursting with joy because of his Lord. He knows his Lord has defeated all of his enemies. He knows his Lord is his savior. He knows his Lord loves him and rejoices over him and he can't keep it in. His heart bursts with joy because of the great things the Lord has done for him. This is the joy he wants us to sing about. This is the joy he wants our hearts to be filled with. This is the joy he wants us to shine out into this dark and scary world.

How can we show this joy in the world? This world is a dark and scary place. Terrible things happen in it. These things make people ask, “Why do they happen? Doesn't God care? Isn't he in control?” We can show our joy to these questioning people by demonstrating our trust in our God. Yes, these things happen and will continue to happen but they don't happen because God isn't in control. They happen because we live in a sinful world which is rebelling against its creator.

We can point to our trust that our creator is in control. He has won and defeated all the enemies. He has given us a perfect peace which politicians cannot give. He has overcome death which is the worst thing the world can throw at us. He has promised to be by our side in every situation in life. He has promised to take great delight in us and rejoice over us. He is the reason our hearts burst with joy and confidence in this dark and sinful world.

God isn't fixing this. The New York Daily News mocked God and his ability to contain evil in this world. The mockery and violence which causes it might make us sad, but Zephaniah reminds us we have reason to sing. We sing because our Lord has cleared away all our enemies. We sing because he has saved us. We sing because our Lord is watching over us with his love. I pray we are able to carry this song into a world which desperately needs to hear this song. Amen.