

“Six Days of De-creation”
Based on Zeph. 1:7-16
Preached on Nov. 15, 2020

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow baptized saints, this is now the second last Sunday in the church year. We are at the end. It's time for judgment. And boy do we need it. Can't you feel it? When you listen to the news? When you watch the television? When you hear people talking? Justice. Where is it?!?! And no – I'm not talking about the other side – whoever that is for you. I'm talking about everyone. Our world has slid into that numb, complacent thinking the prophet Zephaniah described. We're all imagining our own truths. Dreaming up our own delusions. Plugging our ears to words we don't like. We've forgotten. We've forgotten the LORD is going to judge the world. That He is in charge and watching everything – even our hearts. And we've begun thinking, acting, and living like He's not going to act.

No, this is not new. God sent the prophet Zephaniah to preach into a situation just like ours. It was the year 609 B.C. God's people had become soft and lazy. They were caught up in idols of every kind, for they were wealthy, like us. Their lives were comfortable. They were self-assured, putting their trust in their many things. And leaning back in their complacency they imagined God was like them. Inactive. Detached. “The LORD will not do good, nor will He do ill” they said in their hearts. He's not going to act – He's not going to get off the couch - not to help – and not to harm. It doesn't matter what all His prophets have been warning us about all these years. He's never going to judge us. But Zephaniah had a different message.

Stop. Be silent before the LORD God! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated His guests. Yes, you heard that right. That sacrifice is His own people. He's offering them up. Giving them away to others. Their self-righteous hearts cannot be reached any other way. He's tried. And so they will lose the Promised Land. They will lose their public worship at the Temple. The LORD has consecrated the Babylonians to come and take them away. And that is what would happen in 605 B.C. In the siege of Jerusalem, the LORD punished the officials and the king's sons and all who were worldly. The LORD punished those engaging in violence and fraud. The LORD punished all the smug-hearted who told themselves He would never act. And the rest were taken into exile in Babylon.

Their goods shall be plundered,
and their houses laid waste.
Though they build houses,
they shall not inhabit them;
though they plant vineyards,
they shall not drink wine from them.

Everything that got in the way of their faith, the LORD took away. Every idol. Every false security. Everything we put ahead of Him. Everything we build. Everything we make. Everything we've done in hopes that it will last – gone. One thing shall stand. One thing shall hold, and that One thing is the Word of the LORD. The LORD has bound everything up in His Word. Faith will be all that matters – faith in His Word. This is what He must do with us if He is actually going to save us, because none of these other things offer us life in the end. Only He does - by His Word.

God's people did return to Jerusalem 70 years later, just as the LORD had promised. And when they arrived they praised Him for keeping their faith alive in this way. Once more they trusted Him, and could see He had restored them at the right time.

Does that mean Zephaniah's message is done? What is getting in the way of your faith? What are you putting ahead of the Lord? What does He need to take away from you in order to save you?

What a string of questions? It really creates a different way of looking at all the things in our life that try to creep in between us and God. All of them are gifts from Him, but when they start creeping into the center, when they try and take His place as our only security, meaning and identity, then we need to put them in their proper place.

You and I are crying out for justice, but we don't know what's needed. We want things set straight, made true, just and right, but we don't realize how integrated we are in the injustice and the Sin. We want to be made whole, but we struggle to see that that deep part of us that is profoundly troubled, that space, that brokenness – the Lord needs to take that away too. How is He going to do that? How ever is He going to do that?

In Christ. The Word made flesh. That same Word He has bound everything up in was made man. He was prepared as a sacrifice. Given away for others. He took that injustice into His own person on purpose and make it part of the whole. Jesus became the injustice for you. He became the brokenness. He was the One who was punished for you. And for me. And for everyone. In our place. And what He did on that cross reaches all the way to the Last Day. It reaches all the way to you where you are right now. For you are baptized into Him. You have been covered by Him in the waters of baptism, and now everything He accomplished on the cross shields and protects you.

The struggle is real. But so is your shield. The great day of the LORD is near, but in Christ the mighty man you'll hold – for He has cried out in your place – and now there is nothing to fear. Even as God created the heavens and the earth in six days, through the prophet Zephaniah He declares six days of de-creation:

A day of wrath is that day,
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of ruin and devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
a day of trumpet blast and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the lofty battlements.

Sin will be no more. Brokenness will be no more. Death and devil will be no more. For the Lord is going to take apart what He created so that He can make it new. He did it with His people Israel in the exile. He did it with His own Son on the cross, and here He declares He will do it with the entire cosmos. Remember, He made it all for us in the beginning. He's making it all new for us in the end. Faith will be all that matters. Faith in His saving Word. So be silent before the Lord God! For He declares you His own precious child in His Son Jesus Christ. In His holy Name, Amen.