

Sermon for December 23, 2018
"Remember the Joy"

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Do you remember what Christmas was like when you were a child? I remember Christmas morning. After a fitful night's sleep I would wake early in the morning. Usually it was my sister, the night owl, who would wake me around 4 or 5 and we would just stare at the pile of presents under the tree. My parent learned quickly to tell us ahead of time not to wake them until 6. We would sit there on the living room sofa staring at the gifts under the tree with the lights and ornaments. We'd take stock of what was there and wonder at what the wrapped boxes contained. Then when the appointed hour came we would open the presents followed by a family breakfast.

But of course the Christmas morning present frenzy was just the icing on the cake. At an early age I can remember the story of Jesus' birth being an important part of the celebration. I remember dressing up for Christmas pageants. I usually volunteered to be one of the kings. Sometimes I would get to sing a verse of "We Three Kings" as a solo. And we would also attend a Christmas Eve service. Often I was in the choir for the service. The candle light, the communion, the story of God coming in the flesh as an infant and being laid in a manger; the wonder of it all is what I remember

But sometimes I forget. I get all caught up in the business of being a father and husband and pastor and.... I become so busy doing Christmas that I forget to remember. I forget to remember the awe of a child holding a tin box and wearing an aluminum foil crown and singing "Gold I bring to crown him again ...". I forget the candlelight and the communion and the testimony of God come in the flesh. I forget the salvation of God come into the world to the singing of angels and the light of a star!

There were times in Israel's history when they forgot the great acts salvation by God. God had brought them out of slavery with a mighty hand. God even parted the Red Sea. But they forgot and worshipped a golden calf. God led them through the desert and gave them manna from heaven. But when they forgot that power and failed to enter the Promised Land. And for hundreds of years they would from time to time forget and begin worshipping other gods.

Zephaniah lived in one of those times when God's people had forgotten. Bible Scholars are not sure exactly when Zephaniah wrote these words. It was one of those countless times when Israel had forgotten and abandoned their allegiance to God. As a result they inevitably ended up in bad circumstances. Zephaniah obviously believed that they are under some kind of judgment.

Yet here Zephaniah is proclaiming that they have been forgiven. They have been redeemed out of the hand of the enemy. God has taken away judgment. God has turned back the enemy! God has once again saved Israel!

It all started when they forgot. They forgot their savior. They forgot and fell into the ways of the world around them. Now I forget things all the time. To help me remember I write things down; especially appointments. And I check back with my calendar and “to do” list to see if I’ve forgotten something.

I also retrace my steps. If I forget where something is, I look for it by remembering where I have been. Then I have an idea of the places to look. Where do I remember seeing it last and where was it? It must have gotten lost somewhere between here and there.

I also use little rhymes, sayings, and songs to help me remember things. When I was little I couldn’t remember which was my right hand and which was my left. My sister taught me a little saying: “The right hand is the one you write with and the left hand is the one that’s left over.” I still have to use it sometimes or I wouldn’t be able to tell my right from my left.

Now what was the point of all this? Oh, yes, it’s written right here. “Perhaps we should do the same to remember the joy of Christmas.” It’s all written down: the star, the shepherds, the wise men, the baby in the manger. First we should take the time to refresh our memories about the story.

And we should retrace our steps. Where did you last see the joy of Christmas? If we work our way back to that point maybe we can find where we have lost it.

And then there are the rhymes that help us remember the Joy. Remember the poems and songs that remind us of Christmas. Recall those words: “Silent night, Holy Night,” “It Came Upon A Midnight Clear,” “Gold I bring to crown him again.”

The prophet Zephaniah said “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!” We should take his advice. We too have been liberated just as Israel was back then. And we too are in danger of forgetting the wonderful act of God’s grace. We may end up worshipping the things of this world and facing judgment.

Sing aloud this Christmas! Recall the Joy of Christmas in song. Remember the story of what God has done! Sing of the salvation of God brought to us through Christ. Praise God with songs of angels and shepherds and kings. Speak out loud of how God has redeemed us from slavery to sin and death.

And remember! Remember the wonder and awe of Christmas. Remember songs of peace on earth and good will to all. Remember the joy of Christmas.

Too many people have forgotten. Like the children of Israel who forgot the power of God, many in our world have forgotten. They need us to sing aloud. To sing of God’s great acts of salvation. Sing aloud this Christmas and remember the Joy!