

December 13, 2015
Zephaniah 3:14-20

Advent 3C
The King Will Have His Day

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Advent KING! Amen.

On the third Sunday of Advent we light the pink advent candle, the candle of joy. So really our texts for today should be all about joy. For the most part they are...there's also the sense that there are days full of joy and days not so much full of joy. Really, we often talk about good days and bad days, and life seems to be full of some of each. We all have them...good days and bad days. It's part of life. When we have a bad day, it might seem like nothing is going right, from the moment we stub our toe as we climb out of bed in the morning to the moment you overcook dinner. And if we have a bad day, we look forward to that day when things will be good. We might even say, "We'll have a better day." Or, "I want my day in court, when truth and justice will prevail." It reminds me of vicarage when a young autistic man was diagnosed with cancer and he always told me, "Vicar, tomorrow will be a better day."

Of course, our measures and means of evaluation are often affected by our own definitions of what is good or bad, and sometimes what we think is bad is not so bad, or we may learn that it is even good. And conversely, what we may think is good can so often turn out to be bad.

In the ancient world, kings – and I suppose world leaders today, too – can have good days and bad days. They don't like to talk about bad days...sometimes they even downplay them...and they certainly don't like their people—or their enemies, for that matter—to hear about anything bad. As humans we have a very selfish and self-serving way of measuring things, and we want things to be good, or at least appear that we are good.

Of course, deep deep down we know this is not true. How many times do we sense that others (and yes, also we ourselves) are putting up a good front, as we say. Maybe we are hiding our problems or internalizing our sadness, but we'd rather talk about good days than have to deal with the bad ones.

The Old Testament prophets talked about good day and bad days. But they had a deeper understanding of the realities of life. They measured and evaluated by something other than human wants and wishes, needs and notions. They understood reality—past, present, and future—from the perspective and vantage point of God himself, who made all our days.

One of the biggest problems that these prophets—preachers, let's call them—encountered was the propensity of the people to get the good days and the bad days mixed up and turned around. Isaiah gets to the heart of this when he says, "*You call evil good and good evil, darkness light and light darkness, bitter sweet and sweet bitter.*" We pick what looks good, but too often it's not so good for us.

Part of the problem was that the people thought that God actually owed them only the good stuff that they wanted. Since they were the people of God, they thought they were privileged to have things their way. And since God was a God of salvation and deliverance they assumed that he would, well, save and deliver them no matter what. (Oftentimes we think the same thing!)

And they knew this phrase that talked about God's great day—the "day of the Lord" – as a day of salvation. But the prophets (these "preachers" of the Old Testament) had a way of turning this talk of the day on its head. Amos, for example, called out, "*Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness and not light! It is as if a man fled from a lion, a bear met him, or he went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall (safe at home?) – and a serpent bit him. Is that the day of the Lord darkness and not light?*"

Last Sunday we had a similar taste of how the truth of God can turn us upside down, when Malachi told the people who were crying out for justice that when the king comes to bring justice, they'll get justice all right – and no one can endure the day of his coming.

Today, in our text from Zephaniah, we hear another prophet who speaks of the day of the Lord. Listen to his words in Chapter 1 (read 14-16).

If that was our text today on the Sunday of Joy...we'd be pretty upset. For this does not sound like a good day. A day of joy...not really. But here's the twist. This is what must be done. God comes as kings to get the job done, not to agree to our demands of our definitions of good and bad, light and darkness. In the end, if we have sinned and fallen short of the glory and goodness of God, then every day, and especially our last day, our judgment day, will be a day of darkness and distress.

But God has a way of showing us, first, that all our day—or that any day lived apart from his light—is a day of darkness. And what's more, in that great reversal (here's the twist), God has a way—his one and only way—of showing us that all those bad days have been made into good days.

This is because of the one great day, a day that should be called the "baddest" day of all, the day on which the innocent Son of God and our Lord of Lords and King of Kings was put to death, not for anything he had done, but for the sins of all the world, including yours and mine. What seemed a day of the greatest injustice turned out to be the day that the king finally got justice done. And what do we call this "baddest day?" We call it GOOD FRIDAY! God has turned the bad day into good, and the darkness of that day we can claim as light, the glorious light of Easter morn: He is risen, and ascended and lives and reigns to all eternity.

Dear fellow saints of God, gathered together on this the third Sunday of Advent,

We are in the midst of our own good and bad days (like I've said, we all have them), busy days preparing for Christmas and the New Year. But every day is lived in the shadow of the darkness and the light of Good Friday and Easter morn...that is precisely why Christ was born on Christmas.

So, here, in the midst of Advent, we are already thinking ahead of our Lord's passion, death, and resurrection, as we do every SON-day, in the light of God's son, our Lord of lords, our King of kings. Last Sunday the theme of Advent turned dark. Malachi reminded us that the king whom we are seeking will come—but with a twist. Though well announced, he will come suddenly, and with a surprise. Those who were looking for justice will find judgment. Those who were looking for light will find darkness.

Today, the prophet Zephaniah brings us to the end of the story; those having a dark day will see the light.

- Even in the midst of the dark deeds all around us...the mass shootings, the violent crimes, the rapes, abuses, and murders,
- Even in the dark uncertainties of our world and our lives – what will happen as terrorism continues to spread? the cancer has taken control, what does the future hold? I lost my job, how will I take care of my family? Mental disease is taking over...how will I go on? There are many uncertainties in life and in the world.
- Even in the midst of the dark secrets that we keep hidden, out of sight and out of light...the secret sin that has plagued us for year, the secret addiction that causes us so much pain on the inside, the secret that we tarnish our reputation...
- Even in the midst of every darkness that we suffer from

God has a message of a very, very, very Good day.

“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion...

Rejoice and exult with all your heart...

The Lord has taken away the judgements against you.

The King of Israel is in your midst—

Right here, right now, in his word of grace and forgiveness, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

In his body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sin.

On THAT DAY (like today, it's a good day, hear the Word of God)

It shall be said to Jerusalem (that includes you, right here, right now)

Fear not, O ZION!

Let not your hands grow weak.

The LORD your God is in your midst—

A mighty one who will save.

Yes, the kings of the earth have their days. Good day and bad days. SO do we...don't we know. We all may wait to “have our day,” but this day, this very day, is our day indeed. It is the Lord's day, it is the Day of the Lord. The king has come and had his

day; it was a day that turned out to be a very GOOD DAY, more specifically...A GOOD FRIDAY.

And because of his day, makes all our days his – his good days, for us!!

The next time you have one of your bad days, remember it's His day, it's the King's day, and as you live in His Light...it's a good day, and the sins committed on that bad day are forgiven you.

All of your days are His, the King's days, which means they are good days!!

In Jesus Name, our Advent King. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, our Advent King.. Amen.