

Advent Meditation

Zephaniah 3:14-20

3:14 Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!

3:15 The LORD has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

3:16 On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

3:17 The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing

3:18 as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

3:19 I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

3:20 At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the LORD.

Today is the Sunday of Joy. And we say goodbye to a much loved soul. Phil Day has been a part of our congregation for some time and we see him as a true blessing. And even though we may feel sad that he is moving away from us, we know that life brings changes, and that this is a new beginning for him.

Beginnings are kindled with excitement and anticipation. An end of one phase is near, but what lies ahead? What new revelations will unfold for Phil as he begins a life in retirement? How will our church deal with his leaving? The unknown can be terrifying and filled with dread. But our 3rd Advent scriptures call us to Rejoice . . . and not to fear. For the man whose life is dedicated to music and song - on this day we hear quotes from our scriptures making reference to singing. From the responsive reading, "Sing praises to the Lord . . . shout aloud and sing of joy." From our scripture, "Sing aloud, O daughter Zion," "The Lord your God . . . will exult over you with loud singing."

Singing has a mystical way of touching the Holy Spirit. Singing connects us to God and to each other. Singing is a form of prayer and a way of lifting us up from whatever is burdening us. So it is only worthy that this phase of our church life with Phil Day as our Music director is going out in song! And balancing that with the awareness that we are focusing on Joy today may help the pain of separation.

The good news today is that we are all connected to each other - regardless of how far away Phil tries to go, we are into eternity a part of each other. Our souls have touched, and we know that Jesus is here with us as well, we are all brothers and sisters together, forever - and for that we can have joy.

In our sermon scriptures it is promised that our Lord is in our midst and that he will bring us home. Home in eternity - in thoughts and in love, in compassion and justice . . . that is where we are going for Christmas. Home to that place in our souls where we know that God

is born in our hearts. Home, where we meet our families - even those we aren't related to, and we do as Paul said Phil did in our Gospel reading where he said that brothers and sisters in faith can "refresh each other's hearts".

"Refreshing each other's hearts," that is such a fantastic image for Advent, for music, for friendships! When our lesson said at the end, "I will make you renowned and praised [and] restore your fortunes before your eyes." I wondered how or if I was going to deal with that, but now I know. There is mystical power in the moment that one person breaks through all those fears and insecurities you have, refreshes your soul and makes you feel like you are home - and that restores the fortunes of our hearts and makes us feel worthy and renowned in that one amazing moment.

And that is what I wish for us all here today - and especially for Phil, that we find our homes in God's people all over the earth, and *experience* 'refreshing each other's hearts,' while practicing the art on as many others as we can. Amen