

A Song of Joy and Reassurance

*Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!
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.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.
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 as on a day of festival.
I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.
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.
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. Zephaniah 3:14-20 (NRSV)*

Reaching for my favorite NRSV Bible with thirty years wear on it, I tried to remember where the Old Testament book of Zephaniah was located. After all, I had to memorize the 66 book names when I was in Lutheran grade school, but, alas, as a seasoned woman my recall has been recalled! Consulting the index, I found chapter 3 and was surprised to see the very scripture above – the one assigned to this date in 2021-- underlined and with notes in the margin: “The Cenacle, Sister Judith, 6-18-1992, on retreat.”

It was a three-day silent retreat, with only a one-hour daily conversation with a spiritual director. Quite a challenge for this “Chatty Cathy,” especially not being allowed to say “Please pass the salt” at the dinner table! Remembering it was an intentional time of discernment for me, the silence was necessary in order to shut out the noise and interruptions of my everyday busy life as I sought wisdom in making an important decision. When Sister Judith gave me the Zephaniah verses for meditation, they landed on my heart like a soothing balm. The writing of a prophet who lived 640-609 BCE helped me confront my fears of judgment, disaster, rejection, and shame; announcing God’s forgiveness and love with words spoken years later by an angel to a young Mary: “Fear not.”

Now, during a season in my own life when I have questioned why God sometimes seems so silent, the words of Zephaniah written 1400 years ago remind me once again of God’s faithfulness and love. Especially during our ongoing pandemic and chaos in the world, we can reap the harvest of “the Word of the Lord” as we move through this waiting time of Advent, strengthened each day as we face our own fears and anxieties.

My Advent challenge to you as reader is to make time each day – even if you don’t feel like it -- to “sing...rejoice...exult” in how God shows up in your life. Use your imagination to listen to our loving God as God “**exults over you with loud singing.**” Identify the ways in which God is acting to “remove disaster,” “save the lame,” “gather the outcast,” “bring **you** home.” Write down your prayers of gratitude or make a list of ten things you are thankful for and ten of your richest blessings. At the end of each day, review your lists and bend your ear to God’s “loud singing.” As you rise to each new day, be God’s vessel of love and healing and joy into the world.

God bless you and keep you, my friend.