

Sunday, December 16, 2018 – Third Sunday of Advent
“The King Will Have His Day”

Zephaniah 3: 14-20

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Story Framed Structure

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

We often talk about good days and bad days and life seems to be an admixture of each. If we are having a bad day we look forward to when things will be better. We might even say, “We’ll have 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 really isn’t so bad, or we may even learn that it’s good. And on the other hand, what we think is good can often be bad. Very bad.

In the ancient world kings – and I suppose world leaders today as well – can have good and bad days. They don’t like to talk about the bad days, and they definitely don’t like their people or their enemies for that matter – to hear about anything bad. As humans we have a 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 down we know it isn’t true but if we can manage perceptions and put up a good front, if we can hide our problems, internalize our sadness and only talk up the good, maybe we can fool others... and we hope we can fool ourselves as well.

The Old Testament prophets talked about good days 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 and needs and notions. They understood reality – past, present and future – from the perspective of God Himself, who made all our days, good and bad.

One of the biggest problems these prophets faced – preachers, let’s call them – was the tendency of the people to get the good days and bad days all mixed up. Isaiah gets to the heart of it 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 so often it isn’t good for us.

Part of the problem is that the people thought that God actually owed them only the good stuff that they wanted. They were the people of God so they thought they were privileged,

entitled to their way. Since God was a God of salvation and deliverance, they assumed he would, well... save and deliver them, no matter what.

They knew this phrase that talked about God's great day – the “Day of the Lord” – as a day of salvation. This phrase pops up all over the place in the Old Testament prophets – but these prophets, preachers 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 and a bear met him, or he went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall (safe at home?) and a snake bit him. Is that the day of the Lord darkness and not Light?”

Last week 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 something like, “You want justice? I'll give you justice all right!...” No one can endure the day of His coming.

Today in our text from Zephaniah another prophet speaks of the day of the Lord. He says, “The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. 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. I will bring distress on mankind so that they shall walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the Lord.”

Do you call that being a preacher, or do you call that being Captain Bringdown? Should we make that a song? Should we play it over the speakers in downtown Summerlin, or stream that through Pandora or Spotify? That certainly isn't going to help retail sales or bump revenue for all those stations only playing Christmas music, is it? That doesn't sound like a good day. But here's the twist – this is what has to be done. God comes as king to get the job done, not pander to our definitions of good and bad, light and darkness. In the end if we sinned and have fallen short of the glory and goodness of God then every day, 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 days – or any day lived apart from his light – is a day of darkness. And what's more, in this 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.

All because on one great day – the day that should be called the worst day of all, the day on which the innocent son of God and our Lord and King was put to death, not for anything he had done but for the sin of the world – a day of the greatest injustice at all turned out to be the day the king finally got justice done. And what do we call this “bad day?” We call it GOOD Friday! God turned the bad day into good and the darkness of that day we can claim as light, the glorious light of Easter – He is risen, and ascended and lives and rules forever.

So here we are, third Sunday of Advent, in the middle of our own good and bad days. We’re busy preparing for Christmas – decorating, shopping, eating and drinking, attending parties, seeing loved ones and perhaps also people we may love but can only take in small doses. Every day is lived in the shadow of the darkness and the light of Good Friday and Easter. Here in the middle of Advent we’re already looking ahead to Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection, like we do every Sunday in light of God’s son, our Lord, our King. Last Sunday the theme of Advent turned ark. Though well announced he will come suddenly and with a surprise. Those looking for justice will find judgment. Those looking for light will find darkness.

But today the prophet Zephaniah brings us to the end of the story – those having a dark day will see the light. Here as darkness surrounds us God has a message of a very Good Day to come: “Sing aloud O daughter of Zion... rejoice and exult with all your heart... the Lord has taken away the judgments against you. The King of Israel is in your midst (right here, right now in his word of grace and forgiveness, in his body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sin)... ON THAT DAY (like today it’s a good day)... it shall be said to Jerusalem (including us today) 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 earth have their days good and bad, so do we. We all may wait to “have our day” but this day, this very day is our day. It’s ours because it’s the Lord’s Day, the Day of the Lord – the king has come and had his day, a bad day that turned out to be good. And because of His day He makes all our days His – His good days for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.