

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost – (Part 2)

EASTER IS THE NEW DAY OF THE LORD

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

7Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.

12At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, nor will he do harm." 13Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.

14The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. 15That day will be a day of wrath, 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, 16a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements. 17I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind; because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. 18Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath; in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be

consumed; for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

DIAGNOSIS: They Did Evil, They Trusted Evil, Evil Came

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *They Did Evil in the Sight of the Lord*

Before the high priest Hilkiah found the book of the law in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 22:8) and brought it to King Josiah, there was the son of King Hezekiah, named Manasseh. He ruled over Judah for fifty-five years and “he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 21:2). Then the Lord said by his servants the prophets, “I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish” (2 Kings 21:10). One of those prophets was Zephaniah. The law of God was lost, the law that tells people to trust in God and to love their neighbor. The law needs to tell people to trust God and love their neighbors because people by nature cannot love or trust God and are full of evil and selfish desires from birth (Augsburg Confession, Article 2).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *They Have Not Trusted in the Lord*

Zephaniah judged Jerusalem as having “not trusted in the Lord; it has not drawn near to its God” (Zeph. 3:2). Second Kings lists witchcraft and false idols and abominations worse than the people who lived in the land before God gave it to his people. Zephaniah condemns the priests because “they have done violence to the law” (Zeph. 3:4). The people had no faith in God, saying that God will do nothing about what they do. In other words, to them God was either without care or without power (Zeph. 1:12). God was useless. So people put their faith in their wealth, in their house, and their vineyards. So today people put their

faith in their wealth, in their knowledge, in the accomplishments of their children, in entertainment, and in sports. For often the fans and the athletes will talk of “faith,” faith in their own ability to win.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The Prophet Warned of the Day of Wrath*

The purpose of the law that Zephaniah spoke was not to destroy people who had no faith in God, though that is the final result of God’s law when not heeded. Zephaniah spoke the law in order to turn people back to God, to make them realize that such “a day of wrath, 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” (Zeph. 2:15) was so terrible they would be helpless to stop it or overcome it. In that helplessness they would turn to God for help. That is what the law is made to do, not just demand good works, but to warn people they will be put to death by God. God cannot be stopped, so they must turn to God for mercy.

PROGNOSIS: Christ Overcomes Evil, Gives Us Faith in Him, So We Serve with Love

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Suffered the Day of Wrath*

Zephaniah promises that God will leave a remnant who “shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord” (Zeph. 3:12). And though Zephaniah promises God will take away “judgments against you” (Zeph. 3:15), that meant the judgments would happen, and then be taken away. They would be brought home from exile (Zeph. 3:20). Yet judgment and a return of people who are unable to trust God and love their neighbor changes nothing. But from the remnant will come a son of David, the son of Joseph and Mary, who were “of the house and family of David” (Luke 2). Their son was named Jesus, who suffered the judgment of death and then defeated

death by rising from the dead.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *Christ Lives in Us*

Jesus finished the law, and by his promise of forgiveness produces faith in him in our hearts. That faith in Jesus is what God regards and reckons to us as righteousness. Faith in what we do—such as faith in wealth and family accomplishments and faith in winning—is useless before God and God’s sentence of death on us. But faith in Jesus, well, that is to have Jesus live in us and to give us his death and resurrection, so that in him, we have conquered death. In him, God regards us as good, as worth welcoming and celebrating.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *We Live Using Mercy and Love and Forgiveness*

Hearts that trust Jesus are filled with his love and mercy and forgiveness. No longer do we live, but Christ lives in us. With him living in us, we trust God, and Jesus gives us his love by which we serve the needs of our neighbors so they can live and be safe and fed and housed and paid a good wage. But while Zephaniah promises that Israel will be restored and God “will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth” (Zeph. 3:20), Jesus promises that faith in him and using his love to serve others will result in people persecuting and reviling those who trust Jesus (Matt. 5). Nonetheless, we are blessed, that is, given all of God’s good things, namely, the death and rising of Jesus, forgiveness, mercy, goodness, and eternal life. We do not have to trust the things of this world for our rewards, or take pride in and boast of them. Such things do nothing against death. We trust Jesus, crucified and risen. He is now the day of the Lord. We give the Day of Jesus to others by forgiving them, using his mercy instead of the law’s judgments when people ask for mercy. That is Christ’s Day.