

Give a Ringing Cry and Shout!

Zephaniah 3:14-20

The Third Sunday in Advent, December 20, 2009

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Give a ringing cry! Shout! Rejoice! Exult with all of your heart!

Why? Because Jesus has turned aside all of your judgments. He has turned aside everything that you deserved. He has turned aside hell. He has forgiven your sins. He has turned aside death. He rose from the dead. He has turned aside your death. He has turned aside your hell. You will not die in the age. You will rise from the dead. You will live forever before God in the world that is coming. He has turned aside your judgments. He is the judge. He has the right to turn aside your judgments. He has done so.

He has turned away your enemies. He has turned away Satan. Satan is defeated. He is roaring around like a lion because he knows that his time is short. But Jesus does not merely turn away your enemies in the life to come. Jesus also turns away your enemies in this life. He turns away the enemies that you have right now. He may have not done so yet, but He surely will do so. As surely as Jesus is risen from the dead, He will turn your enemies away from you. Just as surely as Jesus has turned aside your judgments, He will turn your enemies away from you.

The Lord will do this because the Lord is in your midst.

The Lord is not on some high mountain somewhere, where you have to go climb the mountain in order to find God. The Lord is not on the far side of the sea, where you have to go on some kind of quest in order to locate God. The Lord is not at the end of some kind of elaborate philosophical system, where you must pursue Him with all of your intellectual might in order to find Him. The Lord is not waiting in heaven for you to climb up to Him to find Him. The Lord is not waiting in heaven for some kind of performance of some religious virtue in order for you to get some kind of reaction out of Him. The Lord is in your midst. The Lord is Jesus. That is the great thing about Christmas. Jesus is born and the Lord is suddenly in your midst.

The Lord is not in the midst of another people so that you have to go and join them in order to find Him. The Lord is in your midst. He dwells here in the midst of you. Do not fear evil again.

Jesus is here. Do not fear evil again. Jesus is here. Do not fear calamity again. Jesus has turned aside your judgments. Do not fear evil again. Jesus has turned away your enemies. Do not fear evil again. Do not fear, O Jerusalem. Do not fear, O Immanuel Lutheran Church.

You are not a spiritual pipsqueak. You are not a spiritual pipsqueak. You have Jesus and Jesus is a warrior. He is a Savior. You have the warrior. You have the Savior. You are not a spiritual pipsqueak. You have Him!

I remember once a student at one of our Concordias. She was studying to be a Lutheran school teacher. She was studying theology. It was late one night. She apparently had a test coming. She came into the room totally stressed out. She was so worried about her performance the next day that she was beginning to wonder whether or not she was cut out for Lutheran school teaching at all. "These parents," she said, "are going to entrust their children to me and I am going to mess up their salvation. I just don't understand this stuff!"

One of her friends looked at her and said, "You're elementary education, right?"

"Yes," she replied.

“Well, when they are that age what do they really need to know? All they really need to know is that Jesus died on the cross to take away their sins. They need to know that He rose from the dead and they will live forever with Him. That’s all they need to know.”

The girl calmed down. I am not sure how she did on the test. I don’t remember that. What I do know is that she is a Lutheran educator today. She was not a spiritual pipsqueak even though she felt like one. She was not a spiritual pipsqueak because she had Jesus. Jesus was in her midst. Jesus turned aside her judgments. Jesus turned aside her enemies.

And people compared to the people of this world who desperately need Jesus you are not spiritual pipsqueaks either. They may ask their complicated questions. They may ask about the problem of suffering and the problem of evil and the empirical problems with faith in God. They may talk about biblical textual criticism and translational problems. They may take the Modernist approach and dismiss the miracles of the Bible. They may do and say a lot of things that look profound when they say them. But in the end they are just a sinner in need of forgiveness just like anybody else. And whom do you have in your midst? Jesus Christ, forgiver of sins and turner aside of judgments.

So don’t let your hands hang limp! Do not say to Him, “I can’t.” Are you kidding Me? I rose from the dead. If I rose from the dead anything is possible. Everything is possible. You can! Don’t tell me, “I can’t.” “I can’t,” never did anything. I rose from the dead. I am in your midst. “I can.” “You can!” “You can!”

Jesus is a warrior. Jesus is your Savior.

Now, in regards to what I am about to say, some of you may say that it does not apply to me. Some of you may say that what I am about to say applies to other people sitting on the pews this morning, but not to you. Some of you may sit there and say that what I am about to say does not apply to you because you’re not worthy, because of some sin, because of what I am going through right now, etc., etc. Ok. Now no matter what you think of what I am about to say, it applies to you. Are you ready? Here it comes: the Lord rejoices over you. The Lord rejoices over you. The Lord Jesus rejoices over you with rejoicing. That means He really rejoices over you. He really really rejoices over you!

Jesus renews His love for you. This day He renews His love for you. The only way that you could possibly question His love for you is if you are thinking about yourself all of the time. He renews His love for you. My land, He died on the cross for you. He suffered and died a gruesome death on the cross to turn aside your judgment. He renews His love for you.

He shouts over you with a ringing cry. Jesus is not ashamed of you. I don’t care who knows it! Let the whole universe know that I love you. Let Satan and all of his demons know that I love you. He hangs His love for you upon a cross for all of the world to see. Jesus is not ashamed of you. Jesus is not embarrassed of you. Jesus shouts over you with a ringing cry!

Now, I realize that I told you that these words apply to you even if you do not think that they do, but I realize that it will take more than me saying it to convince some of you. The reality is that there are a lot of things in this evil world that conspire against us to convince us that God does not love us, to convince us that He is ashamed of us, to convince us that He does not rejoice over us.

We are still oppressed. We may not be oppressed like women living under the Taliban, but we are still oppressed. There are people in this world who oppress us. There are people in this world who do us wrong. There are people in this world who afflict us with grief. There are situations that do the same thing, especially situations that are beyond our control. You know what they are.

Our hearts limp. They really do. They limp. Our hearts go through the day distracted. It is like we cannot focus on what we are doing. We cannot get our work done. We cannot accomplish the simple goals that we have set for ourselves.

We are repelled by the actions of others. We are repelled by our own actions. We are ashamed. Shame really is the basic human problem. That is why Adam and Eve hid among the trees of the garden. That is why they tried to sew coverings together. That is why we won't admit to ourselves that the things that we do that are wrong are really wrong. We won't admit those things to ourselves because we are ashamed of them. We don't acknowledge them so that we don't have to experience the shame, but that does not make them go away. We don't admit them to others or to God so that we don't have the experience shame in front of others or in front of God, but that does not make them go away. We are ashamed and we live in a land of shame. We live in a land filled with shame, but no one will admit it so that they can avoid the shame, but that doesn't make it go away. We generate our excuses and our explanations for what we have done, but that does not make it go away. The shame remains. The land of shame remains. It oppresses us. It likely oppresses us more than other people and situations oppress us.

And Jesus says, "The ones who are repelled, I will gather. Whether they are repelled by the actions of others or by their own actions, I will gather them. You will not be scattered by your shame. You will not be afflicted by it either. I will gather you. I will make you for praise. I will make you for a good name not reproach. I will make you for a good name even in the land of your shame. I will give you a good name. I will save the heart that limps along and while I am at it I will save the bodies that limp along also."

I have brought you. I have gathered you because I have given you for a good name. I have made you praise among all of the peoples of the earth. I will turn your turnings. I will do it in front of your very eyes.

I will turn aside your judgments. I will turn away your enemies. I will turn away your shame and guilt. I will turn away your heart. I will turn away your hell. I will turn your death into resurrection. I will turn all of your turnings. I will do it in front of your very eyes. Just you wait and see!

See! I told you that the Lord rejoiced over you. I told you that He renewed His love for you. I told you that He shouts over you with a ringing cry letting the whole world know that you are His and that He is proud of you. He has your picture on His refrigerator. He has you in His heart when He rests.

Rejoice, O Immanuel Lutheran Church. Shout aloud, O people of God! Rejoice and exult with all of your heart!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.