

Zephaniah 3:14-20

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

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

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

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
¹⁸ as on a day of festival.

I will remove disaster from you,
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

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.

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.

Philippians 4:4-7

¹ *Therefore, my brothers and sisters,
whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*

² *I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche
to be of the same mind in the Lord.*

³ *Yes, and I ask you also,
my loyal companion,
help these women,
for they have struggled beside me
in the work of the gospel,
together with Clement
and the rest of my co-workers,
whose names are in the book of life.*

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near.

⁶ Do not worry about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ *Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.*

⁹ *Keep on doing the things
that you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you.*

Luke 3:7-18

7 John said to the crowds
that came out to be baptized
by him,

‘You brood of vipers!

Who warned you to flee
from the wrath to come?

⁸Bear fruits
worthy of repentance.

Do not begin to say to yourselves,
“We have Abraham as our ancestor”;

for I tell you,
God is able
from these stones
to raise up children to Abraham.

⁹Even now
the axe is lying
at the root of the trees;
every tree therefore
that does not bear good fruit
is cut down
and thrown into the fire.’

10 And the crowds asked him,
‘What then should we do?’

¹¹In reply he said to them,
‘Whoever has two coats
must share with anyone who has none;
and whoever has food must do likewise.’

¹²Even tax-collectors came to be baptized,
and they asked him,
‘Teacher, what should we do?’

¹³He said to them,
‘Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.’

¹⁴Soldiers also asked him,
‘And we, what should we do?’

He said to them,
‘Do not extort money from anyone
by threats or false accusation,
and be satisfied with your wages.’

15 As the people were filled with expectation,
and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John,
whether he might be the Messiah,

¹⁶John answered all of them by saying,

‘I baptize you with water;
but one who is more powerful than I is coming;
I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals.

He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand,
to clear his threshing-floor
and to gather the wheat into his granary;
but the chaff he will burn
with unquenchable fire.’

¹⁸So,
with many other exhortations,
he proclaimed the good news
to the people.

Reading the Prophet This Week

Zephaniah comes from the late 600's BCE
long before last week's post-exile Malachi
celebrating Josiah's reforms – known futile in hindsight

A century earlier, Israel fell to the Assyrians
Josiah's great-grandfather Hezekiah tried reform in Judah,
Josiah tried again for a focus on Yahweh, Torah, temple

The prophet has been condemning the nations and Judah,
till chapter 3 offers hope that Yahweh will honour the covenant,
remove disaster, bring home the scattered – but when if ever?

Last week's prophet warned the Day might burn and bleach
But this text invites anticipation of better reversals –
even as Babylon threatened (and would conquer soon)

Summary intro from 2018:

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2018/12/week-6-sunday-zephaniah-1-3-jonah-1-3.html>

Preaching notes from 2003, 2018, 2021

Each time paired with this week's Luke 3:7-:

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2003/12/context-of-joy.html>

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2018/12/joy.html>

<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2021/12/dont-just-enjoy-yourself-rejoice.html>

I do object to cherry-picking prophets for 'predictions of Jesus',
lest we treat Judaism as obsolete, the predictions completed
but 'the shape of expectation' or 'in the tradition', might be OK

What would it mean to rejoice over divine relief, grace, mercy
forgiven, relieved from consequences of error
to gather the shamed, the outcast?

Reading the Epistle

The Philippians text seems cherry-picked for 'Gaudete':
(the 'pink candle' Advent 3 Joy theme)
Rejoice – rejoice – the Lord is near
'The peace that passes all understanding' blessing

I've presumed to add the lead-in and lead-out verses
(but not household codes)
Welcome affirmation of early women leaders
And conventional catalogue of public virtues
Perhaps to counter accusations of radical revolution

As I noted last week for a Phil c.1 reading:
I posted an intro in 2023 suspecting '2nd generation Paul':
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2023/04/philippians-humbler-than-thou.html?q=Philippians>

Back in 2013, I posted elements of that suspicion:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2013/12/philippians-humbler-than-thou.html?q=Philippians>

Before that, I conceded this as an autograph set Paul:
<http://www.hereticslikeus.com/2008/05/pauls-autograph-set-ap-pealing-or.html?q=Philippians>

So am I learning, or wandering – does it matter?
in the last century, we parodied Bobby McFerrin:
'don't worry, be happy' – Paul singing in prison

Would you, or will you, use the 'rejoice' text,
To fit the mandatory merriment of Christmas?

Reading the Gospel This Week:

Last week introduced adult John, son of Zechariah
'in the tradition of' Isaiah, a 'voice in the wilderness'
this week elaborates, 'according to Luke':

Vv 7-9 matches Matthew's version,
but the baptizer challenges 'crowds', not 'Pharisees/Sadducees'
a wider audience, including Gentiles, for the 3rd gospel

Vv10-14 is only in Luke –
practical concrete application of 'repentance' –
is this more, or less, than we expect to be asked?

Some read Luke as against money –
I prefer to say his audience has money to worry about –
and social roles to lose, like tax or military jobs

Vv15 is only Luke –
the big audience managing expectations –
in the tradition of the prophets, is John to be the Messiah?

Vv15-17 parallels Matthew and Mark,
comparing and contrasting Jesus and another baptism

Vv 18 is only Luke,
summing up these as examples of many words,
proclaiming what gospel to what people?
(since Jesus hasn't begun to work, and audience is mixed)

In addition to preaching notes tied to Zephaniah, try 2006:
<http://www.billbrucewords.com/2006/12/make-it-so-advent3-luke3.html>