

## WELCOME 14<sup>h</sup> February 2021 – Transfiguration Sunday '21 B

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Welcome! It's great to be together again. Delighted you are here.

As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources in your hands. *So that worship is an all week long experience & as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your lives & he will then lead you to someone this week who needs to hear the good news from you.* We are still doing those things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks. Sign in. No morning tea just yet. Offering. Communion.

**As we move into this week...** Creatures of habit...that's us. From Rafael Nadal's elaborate elongated serving ritual to our more private insistence Over or under? We *live* in patterns & habits. From the way we do our daily tasks...exercise routines or making the bed...our preferred route home or place for knives in the kitchen drawer... Some are harmless... bring us comfort or make us unique. Others damage lives & relationships...addictions or self-defeating repetitions.

The Bible tells the same story about all of us...God provides. People rebel. We suffer exile...estrangement...alienation...disconnection. Provision, rebellion, & exile. The repeated pattern of human existence.

But over & over again God promises to break that pattern with one of his own: Redemption by grace. Rescue in love. Restoration for joy.

In a world that shows us a repeated pattern of bleak today followed by a dark tomorrow God comes to re-set our hope to his promises...to trusting his work in us & in our world...to live knowing that because of God's saving love in Jesus the future is an open invitation to vibrancy & vitality...like the sunrise of a new day...& tomorrow reverberates with the fulfilment of today's joy. Hope is, as it always has been, a future certainty anchored in the reality of God's present-tense grace.

*“Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid!  
For the Lord your God is living among you.  
He is a mighty saviour.  
He will take delight in you with gladness.  
With his love, he will calm all your fears.  
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”*

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

*Father we worship you with songs of praise, with words of prayer & with ears that listen for your voice over the noise of our lives. We long for you in the silent spaces where we struggle for hope & courage. We long for a glimpse of your glory: the glory that shines in the darkness & the darkness cannot overcome; the glory that touches lives & heals wounded souls, gives strength to the weary, & draws us into your purifying presence. Grant us grace to live every moment changed by such glory - living to reflect the life of Jesus, through whom your glory shines eternally...Amen.*

Let's sing & then we'll hear God's Word...

### **FAITH CHAT:**

1. What keeps you from really believing that God is delighted in you? If you say “nothing” how do you live it out? What do you do with that assurance?
2. If you could hear God singing over you right now, what song do you think you would you hear?

## Transfiguration '21 B – RE-SET...HOPE

Whiplash is a neck injury caused by to forceful, rapid back-&-forth movement of the neck, like the cracking of a whip. Commonly caused by rear-end car accidents; it can also result from sports accidents & various other types of physical trauma. I reckon you can get it from reading Zephaniah: **BIBLES ZEPH HAG ZECH MAL - MT**

From the 1<sup>st</sup> thundering verses God speaks:

*"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," says the Lord.*

*"I will sweep away people & animals alike.*

*I will sweep away the birds of the sky & the fish in the sea.*

*I will reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble,*

*& I will wipe humanity from the face of the earth," says the Lord.*

*"I will crush Judah & Jerusalem with my fist*

*& destroy every last trace of their Baal worship.*

*I will put an end to all the idolatrous priests,*

*so that even the memory of them will disappear. – Zeph 1:1-4*

to the last words God sings

*"Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For the Lord your God is living among you.*

*He is a mighty saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness.*

*With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."*

*.....I will save the weak & helpless ones;*

*I will bring together those who were chased away...*

*I will give you a good name, a name of distinction, among all the nations of the earth,*

*as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes. I, the Lord, have spoken!" Zeph 3:17-20*

Whiplash anyone? But it's true... The God who punishes sin is the same God who takes away every accusation & judgement against us. The God who lives above our imagination & views our world from eternity is the same God who lives in our midst... sharing our reality every day. The God who hates how sin & self-centred rebellion have distorted & destroyed what He has made is the same God who loves & delights in you & in Jesus gathers the weary & worn out & takes into himself our pain & our punishment so we can live restored & reborn in his image... It's true...

I want to back up for just a couple of minutes... What keeps you from really believing that God is delighted in you? Well... maybe it's reading a few verses like Zeph 1:1-4... A lot of people today have a hard time accepting that God really could be that harsh. We like the idea of a loving/merciful God, but hate the very thought that God can & will hold us accountable for how we live directly against his desires for us & our world. If **that's** part of the picture we want none of it...

But it's interesting to note God's charge against his people... because it could be made today... 1<sup>st</sup> Spiritual Hash of beliefs as if they were all true... believe whatever you want as long as you let me believe my thing... *For they go up to their roofs & bow down to the sun, moon, & stars. They claim to follow the LORD, but then they worship Molech too. And I will destroy those who used to worship me but now no longer do. They no longer ask for the LORD's guidance or seek my blessings.*" – Zeph 1:5-6 - Familiar?

2<sup>nd</sup> – Fish stunk from the head down – leaders were in it for profit not for the people. *Its leaders are like roaring lions hunting for their victims. Its judges are like ravenous wolves at evening time, who by dawn have left no trace of their prey. Its prophets are arrogant liars seeking their own gain. Its priests defile the Temple by disobeying God's instructions. – Zeph 3:3-4* love the power & love the perks... people not so much

3<sup>rd</sup> – Spiritual/Moral laziness – they trusted in their own capacities & their own wisdom & their own achievements... *"I will search with lanterns in Jerusalem's darkest corners to punish those who sit complacent in their sins. They think the LORD will do nothing to them, either good or bad. – Zeph 1:12 – "Your silver & gold will not save you... What sorrow awaits rebellious, polluted Jerusalem, the city of violence & crime! No one can tell it anything; it refuses all correction. – Zeph 1:18 & 3:1 spiritual but not religious*

What keeps you from really believing God is delighted in you? When God 1<sup>st</sup> grabbed hold of Isaiah... *It's all over! I am doomed! I am a sinful man & I live among sinful people. – Is 6:5* I live & breathe in a broken world & my efforts to make a difference sometimes don't get beyond good intentions. I want to... but I don't. As much as I hate to admit it... I live that same pattern/habit of provision, rebellion, & **exile** the Israelites did... that we all do. I was listening to a podcast another pastor recommended... guy out of the US... Peter Wallace/Dave Chappell... Biblical understanding of "exile." Exile is a prolonged separation from one's country or community. But also... Exile is estrangement from one's vision of how life is supposed to be. Exile is a picture of grief & brokenness brought on by loss... of a job... of a relationship... of a loved one ... a foreclosure... addiction... illness... loss of independence... the loss of a dream. Exile is when there's no way you believe anyone delights in you.

Remember: Zephaniah writes during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah <sup>1/4</sup> the exile Josiah was a good/faithful ruler, but his father Amon & predecessor Manasseh were awful... evil. Jerusalem was overcome by idolatry, & the culture was consumed by corruption. The new king, Josiah, tried to bring spiritual reform, & in many ways did, but those already immersed in their sinful ways of life didn't want change. So God has no choice other than to thunder his wrath against human rebellion & sin. God has no choice other than to set the stage for destruction & exile.

But because of his eternal unfailing love for his people, God never allows exile to be the last word. Estrangement is not our destiny. Alienation...disconnection...despair are not how the Father wants his creation, especially we who share his image, to live out eternity. The final word of the prophet is not one of sin & judgment; it's not one of gloom & doom, darkness & despair. The final word is one of joy & salvation, restoration & homecoming as God alone acts to make future an open invitation to vibrancy & vitality and make tomorrow reverberate w/ the fulfilment of today's joy.

*Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad & rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! For **the Lord will remove his hand of judgment**...* God does not forfeit his holiness or his righteousness to address our sin & rebellion. God is at one & the same time righteous against our sin but merciful to <sup>w/draw</sup> his judgement against us because it has been laid upon Jesus in our place. *"By his wounds we are healed."* *Is 53:5/1 Pt 2:24 "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* *Rom 8:1 "He canceled the record of the charges against us & took it away by nailing it to the cross."* *Col 2:14* But God's not finished...

*And the Lord himself, the King of Israel, **will live among you!** At last your troubles will be over, & you will never again fear disaster. On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be, "Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For **the Lord your God is living among you.** He is a mighty savior..."* How many times does God have to say it...God's greatest joy is to live among his people. From beginning to end the Bible tells us God's heartfelt desire is to dwell among us. We bear his image are to live his presence & carry out his loving care in this world. Our sin/rebellion/self-centeredness twist & distort that plan...but God will not be denied & he will accomplish that result. God comes to us in our exile...wherever that might be so that he can be w/ us even there & then lead us into the complete & full freedom of his promises.

*On that day I will gather you together & bring you **home** again.* "Home" That word creates a picture for most of us. It's an address. It's where we sleep, raise our kids, build lifetimes of memories...a place. But the Bible says it's more than that... I love Ps 90 Attributed to Moses it begins: *Lord, through all the generations YOU have been our home!* Home is a person. Home is a relationship...in Egypt the Father was their home. In the wilderness God was their dwelling place. In the land of promise the Father was their home. In exile...in their return...during the joys & struggles...when they were faithful...when they were disobedient & suffering for their sin...God never broke his covenant of love for them. He never released them from his heart. They were never homeless because the Father would never take back his promise. When their pattern of provision, rebellion & exile overwhelmed them again & again God would

again break that pattern with one of his own: Redemption by grace. Rescue in love. Restoration for joy in him...because that is our ultimate destination! Our final home!

*He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.* What keeps you from really believing God is delighted in you? And if you really believe that...what are you doing w/ that great news? If you could hear God singing over you right now, what song do you think you would you hear? With whom are you sharing that song?

The God who punishes sin is the same God who takes away every accusation & judgement against us. The God who lives above our imagination & views our world from eternity is the same God who lives in our midst...sharing our reality every day. The God who hates how sin & self-centred rebellion have distorted & destroyed what He has made is the same God who loves & delights in you & in Jesus gathers the weary & worn out & takes into himself our pain & our punishment so we can live restored & reborn in his image...

In a world that shows us a repeated pattern of bleak today followed by a dark tomorrow...provision, rebellion, exile, lather rinse repeat... God comes to re-set our hope to his promises. God promises to break that pattern with one of his own: Redemption by grace. Rescue in love. Restoration for joy.

*"Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty saviour. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." .....**I will save the weak & helpless ones; I will bring together those who were chased away... I will give you a good name, a name of distinction, among all the nations of the earth, as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes. I, the Lord, have spoken!"*

Let me pray for us...**Father we have only one request...accomplish your will & your way in us. Re-set our lives to obedience & our path to your purpose. Re-establish your rule over us as your people. Reorient our hearts to your promised destiny & fill us with courage to extend your love to everyone we know. Re-focus our eyes to your vision of lives transformed forever & set our spirits free to offer you the worship for which only you are worthy. Re-set our hope to what you have promised & to what you will bring to pass in us through Jesus Christ we pray... Amen.**