

Gracious Father, there will be a day when we sing freely. On Day of the Lord, everything will be made new and our song will resound with praise. However, today is not that day. Today is the day of tears and heartache. Lord, give us reason to sing. Visit us in our despair! Put faith into our hearts so that we can sing. In the name of Jesus, amen!

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Pentecost 6

Pastor Russell Lackey
Reformation L.C.
Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing! It is the Day of the LORD

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

I want to thank the choir for just a moment. I want to thank you for another year of hard work. I want to thank you for your beautiful singing. I want to thank you for pointing to Jesus. Thank you choir! Thank you Priscilla!

As I thought about the choir, I could not help but wonder what the purpose of a choir is. Why do we have a choir? I came up with many reasons. I will share a few. The first purpose of a choir is to use music to point to Jesus. You can all understand this. Music has an ability to move us. Music can carry us to great heights as well as great depths. Music can carry the gospel in a profound way as well as be a means to distort the gospel. Martin Luther once said, "When the devil fell, he fell into the choir loft." Luther understood the power of music. He wrote hymns in order to teach the gospel with song. The choir sings in order to point us to Jesus.

A second purpose for the choir is to help us sing well. I came across a cartoon of a man sitting in his pew with a hymnal in his hand. Next to him was an usher who said, "Sir, you have been recommended for our remedial singing class that meets in the basement of our annex." A choir helps us to sing well.

A third purpose for the choir is to help us sing during those times in our lives when we cannot sing. Times when we have acted unrighteous, when we have been wronged, when we have been rejected or forsaken. At these times, we can cry and curse. We cannot sing.

I think there are many in the Midwest today, who cannot sing. They need a choir to sing for them. They need people like St. Cecilia who can sing in the midst of suffering.

The Day of the LORD: God's NO and YES

In our reading from Zephaniah, we find the people of Judah in a place where it would have been almost impossible to sing. They were on the verge of captivity. Many of them must have wondered what went wrong. A generation earlier was Josiah's reforms. The law was rediscovered. Worship was purified. If there was ever going to be a holy people, these were the ones. Now, a generation later, they were about to lose everything. The temple would be destroyed. A foreign people would rule them. Only a

few of them would return from the captivity. Knowing this, Zephaniah gives them a word of hope. He speaks of the Day of the LORD when the people would sing again. Listen to verse 14ff:

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

This is not what you expect with the Day of the LORD. Most of us think of the Day of the LORD as a terrible day. We have seen the apocalyptic movies. We have read the bumper stickers. I remember one bumper sticker that read, "Jesus is coming back, and he is pissed." The Day of the LORD is supposed to be terrible.

For all of you Doomsdayers out there, you do not have to worry. There will be plenty of destruction on that day. In chapter 1, Zephaniah says:

The great day of the LORD is near— near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. **15** That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness... **18** Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth" (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

It will be terrible day.

Why then the singing? The reason is that the last day is God's final NO to this world. On that day, it will all be gone: the whole "works," all the bitter and sweet fruits of our crazy world, the poverty and the riches, the fretting about the economy, the housing industry, the budget, the war, personal hurts, family struggles, and health problems will be gone. Burned to a crisp! Won't that be grand? A real "Bonfire of the Vanities" to end all bonfires! And then there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. There will be singing because God is saying NO to all the terrible things of this world.

It is also a day for singing because that day is also God's YES to you. Listen again to Zechariah's words:

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem! 15 The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. 17 The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

I cannot wait for that day. It is a day of singing. It is a day of forgiveness. There will be no more tears, pain, sickness, and disease. We will be with God and He will say YES to us. A glorious day!

As from the power of sacred days
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise
To all the Blest above;
So when the last and dreadful hour
Thus crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high
The dead shall live, the living die,
And music shall untune the sky!

You do not have to wait until the last day to hear God's YES. In Jesus, God has already said YES to you. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. In Jesus, God has taken away your punishment and turned back your enemy: sin, death, and the devil. In Jesus, the King of kings is with you. Jesus is mighty to save. His name means, "He saves." Jesus has taken great delight in you and will quite you with his love.

Even more, in the waters of baptism, you have been united to Jesus. God has said YES to you.

- Yes, you are incorporated into Christ and into his body
- Yes, you are initiated, adopted into my covenant people
- Yes, you are called! Chosen! Saved! Born Again!
- Yes, you are forgiven — free to live without excuses
- Yes, you are a royal priest, set aside to proclaim
- Yes, you are marked with the cross of Christ forever
- Yes, you are given the gift of the Holy Spirit
- Yes, you will sing on the Day of the LORD because it is your day.

On the Day of the LORD, the trumpet will sound and God will sing over you. He, who created heaven and earth with a word, will create a new heaven and earth with a song. Until that day, we seek Christ where he has promised to be found: in the Word, the meal, the Absolution, and the conversation of believers. Moreover, we lean heavily on the choir to sing when we cannot. Choir, sing of Jesus! Sing of Immanuel. Sing of God YES.

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**