

## ***Restore Your Fortune***

This morning, we complete the Vigil – the watching and waiting through the darkness of the night – to see, and hear, the good news. The Vigil is like a microcosm of the entire Old Testament – God’s people waiting for rescue, for the light of their salvation.

Last night, we heard the good news of God’s very good creation with the reading of the Creation account – and the flood that results from man’s fall into sin – but even then, there is a refuge for God’s people.

To a people constantly vacillating between faith and unbelief, obedience and rebellion – the Lord provides a way through the Red Sea – a way of salvation, with destruction left in His wake.

Job, like the three men in the fiery furnace – confess their faith in God – trusting in Him, even when their circumstances look grim, and grave. But for our message this morning – our focus will be the good news which the Lord gives to us through the Prophet Zephaniah – promising to gather His people to Himself, and be their eternal refuge.

Zephaniah speaks words of great WOE to God’s people. God is angry with them because of their wickedness, their idolatry, their failure to see their sin and turn from it. Zephaniah preaches REPENTANCE – but they see no need – after all, they say, we are God’s people.

Such impenitence – such false belief, false hope and security – will bring God’s judgment. They are not listening to God, and that’s dangerous. Judgment is on the horizon – the Babylonians will come, and Nebuchadnezzar will besiege Jerusalem. Their false security will be taken away, even as they will be taken away into captivity.

This is nothing new. In the days of Noah, the desires of man’s heart was only evil all the time. In the days of Moses, when God delivered His people from their captivity – they grumbled and complained – they wanted to go back to the land of their slavery – they accused God of leading them into the wilderness so that they might die.

God, in His love – does not abandon the sinner – leaving him in danger. Rather, He comes to crush his idols – to out his false beliefs – and to take away any false hope.

Into the darkness of man's rebellion, God's judgment comes – but He also comes to give hope. He says, through Zephaniah – “But I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord ...”

The impending deluge was meant to turn the people of Noah's day from the darkness of their sin – to the light, and hope, of God's mercy. But only a few, eight in all, took refuge in the ark of salvation the Lord provided.

Even the building of the ark itself was done in faith – believing the reality of the flood that was coming upon the world – a judgment rightly deserved. But for the humble, the repentant – a refuge – an ark – salvation.

It was by faith that Israel stepped forward into the sea – between the two towering walls of water. What must have looked precarious, and fragile – was indeed the means of deliverance the Lord had provided – their refuge in the chaos. The lowly, the repentant, stepped into the sea – “in the name of the Lord” – with faith that the Lord was with them.

“Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save,” Zephaniah proclaims.

Such was the faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who boldly and confidently stood up to the king and declared – “If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not ...” If not, we will still have no other gods.

We shall fear, love, and trust in our God above all things – fear Him above your furnace – love Him rather than your idol – and take refuge in His name, for He is with us. And whether He delivers us from this fiery furnace – or not – He will deliver us on the day of judgment – for He is our eternal refuge.

The good work which the Lord has begun – His repenting the sinner, providing a refuge, and preserving a remnant of faithful ones who trust in Him – He will bring to completion in the great day of the Lord.

In the midst of all the darkness, and chaos, and evil in which you live – the Lord promises that He will gather you to Himself.

“Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; 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.

On that day of destruction, and final judgment – the humble and lowly, the remnant He has preserved, the repentant sinners – will be kept safe in the Lord’s grace which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. But for now, like the Church before us, we watch, and wait.

Dearly beloved, we have journeyed together through the Season of Lent, and through this Holy Week. We have come through the darkness of Christ’s Passion – His death, which seems like defeat, and His enemies cheer.

But we are not without hope, for the Lord “restores [our] fortunes before [our] eyes” – resurrecting before us our Savior, Jesus Christ. He is not dead, He is alive. He who has born all our sin – has paid the debt in full – and His resurrection shines forth the truth that our sin is forgiven!

Before your eyes stands your refuge – your ark of salvation – your way through the water – your deliverance from death and destruction. The Lord Jesus gathers you to Himself today – that He might gather you to Himself, eternally.

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!