

**SHARING THE FAITH: WEEKLY EMAIL DEVOTION
FOR THE WEEK ENDING DECEMBER 13, 2009**

Reading for the week ending December 13, 2009, Third Sunday of Advent:

ZEPHANIAH 3:14-20

¹⁴⁻¹⁵So sing, Daughter Zion!
Raise the rafters, Israel!
Daughter Jerusalem,
be happy! celebrate!
God has reversed his judgments against you
and sent your enemies off chasing their tails.
From now on, God is Israel's king,
in charge at the center.
There's nothing to fear from evil
ever again!

¹⁶⁻¹⁷Jerusalem will be told:
"Don't be afraid.
Dear Zion,
don't despair.
Your God is present among you,
a strong Warrior there to save you.
Happy to have you back, he'll calm you with his love
and delight you with his songs.

¹⁸⁻²⁰"The accumulated sorrows of your exile
will dissipate.
I, your God, will get rid of them for you.
You've carried those burdens long enough.
At the same time, I'll get rid of all those
who've made your life miserable.
I'll heal the maimed;
I'll bring home the homeless.
In the very countries where they were hated
they will be venerated.
On Judgment Day
I'll bring you back home—a great family gathering!
You'll be famous and honored
all over the world.
You'll see it with your own eyes—
all those painful partings turned into reunions!"
God's Promise.

Faith Questions:

1. Where do you consider home to be? Have you ever returned there after a long time away? What was that like? What is it like when you see people you love for the first time in a very long time?
2. For many people, this time of year often includes a homecoming. Returning home and seeing loved ones can be joyful, but it can also be stressful, or a time of anxiety. It can also be a time of loneliness for those whose loved ones are not present, or who are unable to go home. Is Christmas a time of homecoming for you? Why or why not? How does that make you feel—happy, sad, angry, lonely, or something else? How does this week's text speak to you in your own experiences of Christmas homecomings?
3. "God's Promise." What evidence of God's Promise do you see around you during this busy Advent season? What evidence of God's Promise do you see in your workplace, family, and congregation? What is this Promise, and what does it mean to you?
4. One commentary says this about this text from Zephaniah: "No mention is made of any repentance on the part of the people—they are the lame, oppressed, shamed exiles who have been remade by God into a meek, humble, pure-tongued people" (www.enterthebible.org). How do you think God is remaking us, the people of God, today? How is God remaking the church—both Trinity, and the wider church?
5. In this text, all people, regardless of who they are, become a part of a larger community that supports and cares for them. How do you think Jesus fits in to this equation? How might the Advent promise of the Christ-child be related to Zephaniah's message of the end of exile and broken community?

Let us pray:

Hello, Lord. Please remind me of your Promise during this hectic season of preparation. Be with my family and all families this month, regardless of whether our homecomings are joyful or filled with pain. Remake me into a person who can join the larger community without shame or fear. Please constantly show me how the Christ-child "fits" into the larger picture of my life.

For whom else, and for what else, shall we pray? (Insert your own prayer here)

Amen.

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