Sermon for Wednesday 3 of Advent – December 18, 2024

**“Rejoice and exult with all Your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem”**

Please open your hymnal again to hymn # 337 “The Night Will Soon be Ending”

The hymn writer Jochen Klepper was the son of a Lutheran pastor, born in Germany in 1903. After earning his undergraduate degree, he studied theology to become a pastor but dropped out of and worked as a writer, church publisher, and radio journalist. He married a Jewish woman and because of this marriage was later fired from his radio and publishing job as the Nazi government began its persecution in the mid 1930’s. He and his wife tragically died in 1942.

Jochen Klepper wrote this powerful hymn “The Night Will Soon Be Ending” in 1937, in Germany where he and his wife lived as hope and freedom were being swallowed up by despair and the looming world war. The context of growing despair makes the hope of the hymn all the more powerful.

The hymn “The Night Will Soon Be Ending” is probably not high on your list of hymns to sing during Advent, but it should be and here is why…

In this hymn, Klepper writes and gives us a wonderful showcase of Law & Gospel distinctions, which is a hallmark of Lutheran teaching and Lutheran Identity. In every stanza there is a running contrast between the darkness of sin and the light of the Gospel!

**1** The night will soon be ending; The dawn cannot be far. Let songs of praise ascending Now greet the Morning Star! (Morning Star is one of 99 names of Jesus)…

All you whom darkness frightens With guilt or grief or pain, God’s radiant Star now brightens And bids you sing again.

**2** The One whom angels tended Comes near, a child, to serve; Thus God, the judge offended, Bears all our sins deserve. The guilty need not cower, For God has reconciled Through His redemptive power All those who trust this child.

**3** The earth in sure rotation Will soon bring morning bright, So run where God’s salvation Glows in a stable’s light. As old as sin’s perversion Is mercy’s vast design: God brings a new creation—This child its seal and sign.

**4** Yet nights will bring their sadness And rob our hearts of peace, And sin in all its madness Around us may increase… But now one Star is beaming Whose rays have pierced the night: God comes for our redeeming From sin’s oppressive might.

**5** God dwells with us in darkness And makes the night as day; Yet we resist the brightness And turn from God away… But grace does not forsake us, However far we run. God claims us still as children Through Mary’s infant son.

Although the darkness of sin, guilt, grief, and pain is all around us, Christians have true hope in the fact that Christ, who is the Light of the world, will return. Jesus’ first coming at Christmas shone this invincible light into our world to give us this hope even now, especially now when our countries culture is disintegrating and worldwide war is looming on the horizon. That is why we run to the light of Christ as He comes to us now in Word and Sacraments, knowing that He has come for us lost sinners.

That leads us into the first reading tonight from Zephaniah. Just like our hymn writer Klepper who lived during a time of despair and hopelessness, the Prophet Zephaniah, who lived in Israel 600 years before Jesus’ birth, also lived during a time of deep darkness and despair. The northern kingdom of Israel was gone and destroyed, and the southern kingdom, Judah and Jerusalem, were teetering on collapsing. And in just a few years Judah, Jerusalem, and the temple that had stood for over 400 years would all be destroyed by the invading Babylonians and most Israelites would be killed or taken into captivity and exile.

That was the time the prophet Zephaniah was called to preach both Law and Gospel. Zephaniah does not hold back against a sinful and rebellious people, before our reading for tonight, in the first chapter Zephaniah speaks for God and says…

**“I will sweep everything away…I will sweep away both men and animals…I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut of from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests…those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host…those who swear by the Lord and also who swear by Molech…**

Starry host is astrology and the worship of the stars….today every newspaper has astrology, millions of people live their lives believing in the idolatrous practice of astrology…when you believe in astrology, then you believe and trust in Molech, the devil, satan.

Zephaniah continues his terrible Law… **“those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord nor inquire of him…be silent…for the day of the Lord is near!...Listen! The cry on the Day of the Lord will be bitter…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…I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they sinned against Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth.”**

This was the state of Israel 600 years before Jesus when God’s wrath would soon be poured out. This was the state of pre-war Nazi Germany in Klepper’s time when God’s wrath would soon be poured out. This is the condition we find ourselves, the people and the country we live in today and God’s wrath is being poured out as we speak. Without confessing our sins and sincere repentance, time will tell, how much of our blood and entrails will be poured out in God’s wrath to come.

In spite of the wickedness of the country and the people in Nazi Germany during Klepper’s time, he did not leave the people with no hope. In spite of the wickedness of the country and the people of apostate and idolatrous Judah, Zephaniah did not leave his people without hope. Open your bulletins if you will and listen again to the promises of hope and salvation that Zephaniah preaches with gusto in the first reading!

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

This beginning verse 14 is one of the most jubilant songs in all of the Bible! In this one verse there are four words for rejoicing…

**Sing –** The word comes from Latin *lauda* (All Glory, Laud and Honor…., much more than sing)

**Shout** – The word comes from the Latin *jubila* (Jubilee, Jubilation, much more than shout)

**Rejoice –** The word comes from the Latin *laetare* (Rejoice is good translation, 4th week Lent)

**Exult** – The word comes from the Latin *exsulta*

And why are we, God’s people singing, shouting, rejoicing and exulting????

**The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies.**

Satan can longer accuse you because of Jesus…Satan’s head crushed by cross of Jesus…

**The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.**

Jesus is present in with, and under bread wine, waters of your Baptism, Word is spoken…

**On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak.**

Fear not 365X in Bible!! Encouragement to not give up, spread Gospel in Words and deeds!

**The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness;**

Imagine… all angels in heaven rejoice over one who repents…God loves a contrite heart!

**he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.**

John 3:16…His love overwhelms any of the noise of today, noise in your life

**I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.**

The remnant gets smaller, the doubters and mockers get bigger, bolder and more angry, BUT even the gates of hell will not prevail against Jesus Christ and His church…

**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.**

One day soon, all the enemies will be like ashes under your feet, The great reversal, Jesus/cross

**At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together;**

All the faithful will come from the four corners of the earth, dead will rise, gather to meet Jesus

**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.**

Job lost everything, 10 kids, fortune, respect of wife, friends, even own health, but in spite of it all, “I know that my redeemer lives…and I shall see him with my own eyes!!”

Some of the people in Zephaniah’s time believed in the promise of the Savior and in spite of what they saw with their eyes God did gather them together, forgave them and saved them and now they live with God in heaven.

Some of the people in Klepper’s time in the 1930’s believed in Jesus who did come and in spite of what they saw with their eyes and the horror they lived through they were saved and now many live with God in heaven.

And today you who confess Jesus with your lips and believe that he was resurrected from dead are also saved. And in spite of what you see with your eyes going on all around, you too will one day live with God in heaven.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Iowa. Shout, O American! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of St. Andrew, Van Horne! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you!

Amen!