

I'll Be Home for Christmas

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14 – 20

12/25/22

The phrase 'I'll Be home for Christmas' is a wonderful phrase! But most Christmas lately, my wife and I spend Christmas Day with our church family. Our three boys now have their own families and they live far away from us. Our oldest son who you saw in our Advent virtual viewer, lives half way around the world. Our Christmas morning is very different!

I can remember our youngest son, Samuel, having an Advent calendar. Sam never really paid much attention to the yearly calendar, but he did keep his Advent calendar with care! From the first day of Advent onward, Sam would eagerly wait to open the next door on the Advent calendar. With each door, a chocolate would await him. He was very faithful to only open one door a day! This was his countdown of delight for Christmas!

Our grandson in Japan, Grayson, has a Pokemon Holiday Calendar and each day he opens a door on the calendar and behind the door is a Pokemon figure. I just talked with Grayson this past week and he opened a door on his Pokemon Holiday Calendar to get a Pokemon figure. In fact, Grayson went and got all the Pokemon figures he had got. He was very excited to show the figures to Mimi and I.

If I had my wishes, it would be to get a chocolate each day – sorry Grayson, Pappy is not into Pokemon but he loves you!

Most people look forward to the pleasure of Christmas in personal ways that sometimes remain unknown to others. Our subconscious mind is at work in each of us at Christmas.

Have you ever noticed how the singing improves in church during the Christmas season? Have you noticed how good humor seems more evident during the Christmas season? In addition, otherwise dull folks seem almost joyful at Christmas. Sad people seem joyful, private people seem more enthusiastic, and mean people seem happier!

It all has to do with the expectancy of Christmas. The anticipation of Christmas is something wonderful that happens this time of year. Christmas is wonderful! Can I get an AMEN for Christmas being a wonderful time?

In our scripture reading from the Book of Zephaniah, Zephaniah captures part of the deepest longings of our human pilgrimage. He uses phrases like: 'Rejoice and exalt with all your hearts and sing aloud' to express what we are unable to utter with our human prose and poetry. Perhaps this is the reason all of us want to sing the carols of Christmas. We want to sing Christmas Carols the day after Thanksgiving.

We desire the euphoria of Christmas. We need the exhilaration that Christmas hymns do!

The prophet Zephaniah presents the great promises of God in capsule form – 'The Lord has taken away the judgment against you. You shall fear disaster no more and the Lord will renew you in his love.'

These words appear especially hope filled, to the people for whom Zephaniah writes because they are people who feel doomed. This was a time when the sting of Israel's and Judah's devastation was clearly in the people's shared memory. Consequently, optimism appears futile!

Have you ever lived in such a time? Have you lives in a time of devastation? Have you lived in a time where optimism appears futile?
(pause)

Older people have shared the gloom of the Great Depression with me. Older people have shared the pain of WWII. I, personally, have never felt a time of such severe devastation, but I still can relate to that time.

Within Zephaniah's cold prophesy of judgement, there is a warm reminder of hope! Hope is the essence before us now! The Lord God will eventually rectify all the people's fortunes.

For people today, there is a sense of hopefulness that too often pervades our society's thinking. Perhaps, we hear just too much bad news too much of the time. However, the child in each of us remember better days. We ache desperately for the good old days! Can you remember the good old days of peace and hope? Can you remember the good old days with family and friends? Can you remember better days?

This aching for better day's maybe part of the fuel that propels even the most hardened people toward the church on Christmas. We want to know a different ending to our story. Zephaniah speaks to us as he did the people long ago !

God has the final word! But here at Christmas the shepherds, angles, and Mary sing the opening songs. They sing about God's being with us! Hallelujah!

Now to bring my Christmas message to an end, let us listen to Michael Buble sings what is one of my most favorite Christmas songs of hope – 'I'll Be Home for Christmas'. Let us listen to his rendition.

Zephaniah sings a similar song of hope – 'God will bring us home, at the time when he will gather us. For God will make us renowned and praised among all the people of the earth. God will restore our fortunes before our eyes!'

Merry Christmas!