

Sermon Draft

Text: Zechariah 9:9–12

Sermon: “Peace, Freedom, Hope”

Have you noticed that things aren't how they should be? There's selfishness, tragedy, heartbreak, pain, evil, and injustice all over. Inside each of us too. Even St. Paul cries out in today's Epistle, *“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”* (Romans 7:19). There's not a night we can put our head on the pillow saying, “Thank you, God, for enabling me to live a perfect day.” Every day, sin afflicts us. Every day we fail even those we love. Every day, others fail us too. We're a mess, and it's a mess. Indeed, we deserve God's punishment now and forever. How we need a powerful and compassionate rescuer to take over!

Thankfully, the Lord announces through Zechariah: *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he”* (v 9a). King Jesus comes to bring you under His reign of peace, freedom, and hope.

When the Lord brought his people out of Egypt, he wasn't just their God; he was also their King. But God's people weren't content having God as their King. Other nations had earthly kings. Israel wanted one too.

God warned them through the prophet Samuel: a king will tax you, send your sons to war, take your daughters to himself, and fail you. But Israel insisted. Yahweh gave them a king, Saul, but he did indeed fail them terribly. After David was anointed as king, the Lord promised that one of David's descendants would rule on his throne forever.

Even David failed. He murdered a loyal soldier to hide his adultery and steal his wife. Solomon, David's son, was given great wisdom, yet he failed, being led by his many wives into allowing the worship of false gods. After Solomon, the kingdom was divided and grew weaker. King after king couldn't measure up to Israel's true King, the maker of heaven and earth. Eventually, the last king, Zedekiah, was taken to Babylon in chains. He died in captivity, alone.

By Zechariah's time in 520 BC, it looked as though God's promise had failed. The Jews had no king. They had been in exile for seventy years. They'd now returned, and the temple was being rebuilt, but Jerusalem was still in ruins. Yet, Zechariah was given this powerful promise by the Lord: ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he”*** (v 9a).

A king is coming, and he is the Lord himself coming to save us! He is a righteous, faithful, good king. He will sit on David's throne. He has salvation. All things that have gone wrong are going to be set right. Zechariah's words are filled with joy and peace, freedom and hope. They are a breath of fresh air for God's people. They only had to wait five hundred-plus years until these words were fulfilled on Palm Sunday as Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem. Jesus was coming to be King and Savior for all, to restore God as our King.

Our king, though he is almighty God, doesn't mount a horse or chariot to ride impressively into battle. Jesus is a humble king. He rides a donkey into Jerusalem as he chooses to serve you in humility. ***“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey”*** (v 9b). Our King doesn't tax his people but freely gives forgiveness and mercy to them. Our King doesn't send you or your sons into battle first. No, first he makes himself an army of one to defeat sin, death, and Satan by humbly bearing the sins of the world and their deserved punishment and damnation. Then he enlists us to follow him in his eternal victory.

Our righteous King perfectly fulfills all that is demanded of us and credits that righteousness to us as we receive him in his Holy Word, Holy Baptism, and his holy body and blood. Our King doesn't force subjects to bow down to him; he graciously serves with his words of forgiveness and peace, which causes us to rejoice in his abundant mercy and eagerly receive him in reverence and joy.

Our King looks so utterly gentle and lowly as he first reigns on the cross, but there he establishes a kingdom that will never fail. Though humble, he is powerful. He alone defends us, cutting off the chariots and warhorses and battle bows. He destroys death from the inside so that it is only an empty shell of itself. He is a powerful warrior! He is able to set us free!

So, Zechariah rejoices: ***“He shall speak peace to the nations”*** (v 10b). The word for “nations” here is the word for Gentile nations. King Jesus is king for all people. He is King for you and me. Jesus offers peace to all. Oddly, Israel wanted a king so they could be like all the nations, but now in Christ Jesus, God gave his people a king who is for all nations. The one whom all the nations desperately need.

“I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off” (v 10a). King Jesus speaks and delivers peace that is, peace with God. He doesn’t give some sort of peaceful feeling. Nor is his peace the mere absence of warfare. But it is a rich peace of harmony, wholeness, and blessedness.

Through his saving death and resurrection, right now Jesus speaks peace to all: forgiveness, restoration as his dearly beloved brothers and sisters. He also guarantees that the day of resurrection is coming when, as we remain in him, all illness, weakness, and pain will be banished and we will be set free from sin forever, basking in his eternal peace.

And already today Jesus comes humbly right into our midst. Today Jesus speaks peace in his word of absolution, cleansing our sin from us, and in ***“the blood of my covenant with you”*** (v 11). He rides in on bread and wine, his very body and his blood of the new covenant, the new testament the blood-bought promise of God himself. From the world’s point of view, the Lord’s Supper isn’t a powerful event. It appears to be a very small, little meal. But we know from the words of King Jesus what is actually happening. Heaven invades earth right here. Jesus comes to all in his body and blood.

Make no mistake about it: he is a powerful King coming into our midst, a King who can destroy and condemn eternally. But thankfully, to all who repent of their sins and trust Jesus' saving work, he comes gently to touch us, to cleanse us from the inside out. He forgives us. He strengthens us. He meets us, dines with us, and encourages us. He gathers us at the table with his Father and the Holy Spirit.

King Jesus sets us right again with the Father. Our mighty King, defends us from Satan's attacks. He cuts off the chariots, warhorses, and battle bows and keeps us safe in his peace. As Martin Luther wrote to encourage Christians to the Sacrament of the Altar as a defense against Satan, the world, and our sinful nature: **“If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you [Ephesians 6:16], you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as possible. But there is no reason why we walk about so securely and carelessly, except that we neither think nor believe that we are in the flesh and in this wicked world or in the devil's kingdom”** (LC V 82). So, dwell ***“in the shelter of the Most High”*** and ***“abide in the shadow of the Almighty”*** (Psalm 91:1) by letting Jesus defend you and fight for you in his saving body and blood.

The Lord urges us through Zechariah, “*Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope*” (v 12). Zechariah started his book with the Lord’s call, “*return to me*” (1:3). To return to the Lord is to repent, to turn from our sin, to turn from trying to save ourselves, to turn from despair and hopelessness, to come home again trusting our gracious Father, who longs to greet us. In a sense, every time we’re gathering around our Lord’s Word, we’re returning home. We confess our failure, rejoice in our Lord’s mercy, and turn back to the only one who can rescue and deliver us. We come out of exile into the joyful liberty of God’s holy people.

Admittedly, we cannot see the reign of Jesus. We see a cosmos in chaos. We are heartbroken by sin and what sin has destroyed. But our Lord’s Word does not fail us. He keeps his promises. He is reigning. He will visibly return to set his faithful forever free. And Jesus’ reign has room for you. In King Jesus, we will live a full life forever.

In the meantime, we are “prisoners of hope.” That is, we have hope. Not the vague wish for a better future. We have the certain, joyful confidence of what is coming in Christ.

Our certain hope is that Jesus will visibly return, the dead will rise, and we will be changed; that sin will be no more; that death will no more burden us; that pain, heartbreak, and trial will be over; that we will sin, disappoint, and fail no more. The clock is not ticking down to our end but to the fullness of the reign of our eternal King. Our King has come and continues to come for us. This hope in Christ holds us, keeps us, guards us in protective custody until our hope becomes sight.

Thanks be to God, King Jesus comes to bring you under his reign of peace, freedom, and hope.

So how do we live under Jesus' reign? We gather to celebrate his reign over us and to receive him. We rejoice and shout aloud encouraging one another by our Lord's song of victory. We generously forgive those who sin against us, knowing the fullness of Jesus' forgiveness for us. We live as those confident of our joyful future: every burden, heartbreak, trouble, and pain will not last, but our life under King Jesus' reign will flourish. Like our King, we long for all to live with us under his reign. And we wait in joyful, confident hope. Our King has come, still comes, and will come to set us free.

Amen