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Zephaniah 3:14-20
12-12-21

Limp Hands into Boiling Hope

Good Morning Church. This Sunday, we are learning from the prophet Zephaniah, The Jewish people read this passage on enthronement day, which is the day when they acknowledge that God is the king of the universe, the creator of all things. So I dare you to imagine that God is active in history, shaping our world. That's right, today I'm going to speak about h.o.p.e. Hope. How do we continue doing the work of kingdom building when we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel? In the darkness of this winter, how do we await the coming of the Christ child?

Please pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen.

Sometimes I wonder if Christians stare at a kettle of water expecting it to boil, all the while the stove is dark.

Let me share with you one of the joys I had this week that filled me with boiling hope. Someone my age, who I'll name Henry. Henry was bereft of hope, getting lost in drugs and money for the past decade. But he has been doing better recently, got himself through rehab, but still felt the sting of isolation. Henry complained to one of my friends that he does not have a social group, so my friend invited him to church. And low and behold the next Sunday Henry showed up and actually met some people he knew. Who could have imagined that someone my age would come to church after a decade away? I know I couldn't. But once my friend brought up the possibility, suddenly imagining the possibility makes the unimagined possible.

This is all to say, that when we close our minds off, when we throw up our hands and say that a problem cannot be solved, then we have guaranteed that nothing will ever happen. Instead. Let us stare at the kettle of water and place it on the stove.

When the end of the exile comes, God commands the people to do two things, rejoice and do not let their hands go limp. Rejoicing we can understand easily enough, but what is Zephaniah saying about letting hands go limp? Turns out, this is a common phrase found throughout the Old Testament. Joshua asks the men of Gibeon not to let their hands go limp in coming to save them from the Amorites. Saul's son's hands went limp when he found out that Abner was dead. Jeremiah reports that when scouts see a Babylonian army coming south, the people's hands go limp. Hands go limp when the battle is already lost before it is fought, hands go limp when people fail even before they have started working.

Limp hands do no work. You've heard it said, a watched kettle never boils, but I say to you. Watch that kettle. Look for the flames heating it up and listen intently for the whistle to tell you it is boiling.

This Advent season, I've preached about how waiting for Jesus means learning how to be surprised. Today, I add that this waiting cannot be idle. If we are going to be prepared for the coming of the Christ child, I believe that we must dare to imagine the glory that Christ is bringing. We must be prepared for the end of this current world of darkness when the light of the world is born to us. Jesus's birth is heralded by dirty poor shepherds, opposed by the powerful. Jesus is going to shake things up, he will heal the lame and eat with the outcasts.

How can we await God's firey holy spirit to flow through us, so that we can be conduits of healing and hope in the world? How do we turn that stove knob, joining God in the work of boiling that kettle?

First, Dare to Imagine. I want you all to take a dose of wild idealism. Imagine the end of exile. Imagine the coming of Christ. Let us be wild dreamers in the kingdom of God. I know that right now many of us are feeling lost and without direction. With our hands limp as we wait out this pandemic. So let us imagine how our church can be a place of healing for people struck down. Throw open the church doors wide and set a table of welcome for the outcasts. Rejoice for lonely people are here and can find a community to call home.

First we must imagine God's kingdom. Then we can begin to live as if it is already here.