

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 3, 2011**

Zechariah 9:9-12 "Know God, Know Peace"

This week we conclude our series on peace. Last week Jeremiah announced that there would be no peace for Israel because they had been disobedient and worshipped other gods. Jerusalem would be destroyed, and the nation would go into exile. God sent Jeremiah to prepare the people of Israel for this and to turn their hearts back to the Lord, their God. We also heard how our Brother's Keeper Ministry and our own personal efforts as baptized children of God to encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ toward faithful worship makes us the Jeremiahs of our own time. We help the Body of Christ at St. Paul's to worship together as one people to God's glory in Jesus Christ and for our own spiritual good.

While last week Jeremiah stated that there was no peace for Israel because they no longer knew God, today Zechariah proclaims that because the people know and worship God, they will know peace. This peace comes to all people through the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Zechariah calls his people to rejoice because of this peace that Messiah brings. Today, we too can rejoice because the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has brought us peace, righteousness, and forgiveness of our sins. Because we know God in Jesus Christ, we know true peace.

Zechariah writes about this time of peace and how the king of Israel is going to come into the city on a donkey. When I read the Old Testament reading for today, I thought, "Wait a minute. This reading is for Palm Sunday. What are we doing back here? It was Jesus, our king, who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey." And in God's time, Jesus did indeed fulfill this passage of scripture when he came to Jerusalem as king, riding on a donkey. Of course, Jesus always made it clear to the people that he was not going to be another one of their earthly kings who sit on a throne in the line of the kings of old. That was the kind of king that Herod thought Jesus was going to be, and so that is why he wanted to kill him when he was a baby. He saw him as a threat, but he was wrong. Jesus would not be that kind of king.

Jesus did not come to resolve our world's problems, as serious as they can be. Jesus came to deal with our deeper spiritual needs. Zechariah writes that the Messiah is coming with salvation for a fallen creation. All people need a Savior to save them from their sins that separate them from God. Paul writes about this in Romans reading today when he tells about the struggle of the sinful nature within us. The trouble that came to the world through Adam and Eve's sin is being fixed in Jesus. Although we all sin against God and each other every day, Jesus came to save us from our sins. Jesus resolved our deeper spiritual issues. Therefore, Zechariah is excited and calls to us to "Rejoice."

When we come to understand what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, then we can rejoice. Zechariah uses the image of war to help Israel understand the joy that the Messiah is bringing them. There were wars in every generation of Israel's history from the time they settled in the Promised Land. We are no strangers to war either. This weekend we remember the battles that were fought so that our United States of America could be a free land. There were wars such as the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Spanish American War, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. There were many wars in the last century such as World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War. Our nation has been engaged in war, conflict, and military action throughout its history, and most recently our nation has joined the war against terrorism. We are no strangers to war, nor were the generation of people before us. The

battles our nation has fought through the years are fought in the name of freedom and to accomplish peace.

The people of Israel also were no strangers to war, and the last war resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of God's people. Zechariah writes that Israel's king, the Messiah, was coming to put an end to war and to speak peace to the world. This is not the world peace for which we yearn, but it is the eternal, spiritual peace which our world's citizens all need through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' war for the world was against our sin and death. Jesus took the sins of the world upon himself in a great battle at the cross. He took the punishment we deserve for our sins. He went to war against our sins, and he won the victory through his death and resurrection. Today Jesus proclaims to our world his victory over sin and death. We have the entire forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Our spiritual battle is won. Rejoice!

There is another reason to rejoice. God is not satisfied to save just a few people. God wants to save everyone, and so he has entrusted to us the message of the Gospel of peace which we are to share with the world. Jesus shed his blood in order to open up the door of peace to everyone, which peace with God people receive when they put their trust in Jesus' sacrifice for sin. This means that Jesus wants to give forgiveness and peace to our family members, friends, and other people we know.

We have the privilege to share our faith with those we love. When we share our faith in Jesus with others, we put before them an open door to God. We teach them that God has forgiven their sin. We tell them that their spiritual warfare is accomplished. We offer them peace with God.

I just ran across the naturalized citizen record for a possible ancestor of Edie's who came from Germany and settled in Frederick County. I've looked at many of these certificates and their applications in the past. What always strikes me is the witness who comes forward with the person who is making his or her petition. He or she is supporting the individual in order to become a citizen.

When you share your faith in Jesus with someone else, you are telling them that they can become a naturalized citizen in the church of God. You are telling them that they matter to God, that the blood of Jesus covers their sin, and that they can live with God forever in a free and united heaven. God gives us the privilege to work with him in building the kingdom, and when we see success, we have great joy.

Zechariah writes to the nation of Israel that God will restore double to his people with their return to the land. All that was taken away because of their exile was restored to the people. So, too, we who lost everything due to our sins have received the entire forgiveness of our sins and an open door to heaven. We are assured that everyday God richly forgives our sins and keeps the door open for us in heaven. In fact, in the Gospel reading today, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The burden of our sins is lifted from us. We can rest in the assurance that our spiritual battle is won through Jesus Christ, and that nothing can ever separate us again from God.

Generation-after-generation of people has experienced both war and peace. We will never have eternal peace for our world until Christ comes and this world comes to an end. However, God does promise the world eternal spiritual peace through Jesus Christ. When we put our trust in God through Jesus Christ, then we have eternal peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins and because of our righteousness in Christ. People of God, "Rejoice. Your king has come!"

*soli deo gloria*