

Third Sunday in Advent – December 13, 2015
Text: Zephaniah 3:14-20
Theme: "Sing Aloud!"

For centuries, the Lutheran Church has been known as the singing church. Garrison Keillor comments on how little Lutherans learn to sing in parts by growing up sitting on the lap of someone who is singing his part. We have lost some of that because of our insipid covering to our culture. In an effort to be "contemporary" many of our churches only hear an off key soprano wailing the melody into a mic under a spotlight accompanied by the thrum of electric strings and pounding drums. Yes, I have been to a great many "contemporary" worship services and almost all of them are hideous. People do not even take the time to ask, "What is 'contemporary' about singing a song written 20 years ago?"

We almost lost our musical heritage because of stupidity and arrogance. It is a great sadness that we have lived through, but it does seem to be slowly turning. Many of you gave me copies of the article that was in the Tribune last spring, written by a millennial explaining why she had no need for church to be cool. In fact, she is looking for something that transcends the latest fads, something bigger than whatever is contemporary. Church should not be like the latest tattoos or coolest belly button rings. If you are an adult, you know that we all go through the fads of our times and

eventually, hopefully, we grow out of them. But Church transcends the times. One of the ways we have transcended for more than 3 thousand years is through our song.

Our Old Testament reading is poetry from the prophet Zephaniah. In his poem, he encourages us to sing. And about what are we to sing?

¹⁹Behold, 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.

²⁰At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; 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.

This is not a poem about how we "feel" about life. This is not some kind of subjective nonsense about how good we want to be or what great things we want to do. This is not even about how we "feel" about God and it is not a cool rhyme set to a hip beat with lots of bass and drums. It is a poem about God's promise to us that he will rescue us from all the trial and trouble of this earth. He will send his son to die for us and restore us as his people, holy and righteous before him. This is the song God gave to us to sing alongside the angels that the world might know him and that people who feel far off and unloved might hear his rich and beautiful Gospel

melody sung aloud by his people. Zephaniah wrote this contemporary lyric written 2,600 years ago!

This is why we sing! Music is the handmaiden to the message. Music forms pathways in our brains and creates seedbeds where faith will grow. When you hear this tune what do you think?(Handel's Alleluia Chorus) Handel's amazing music carries the text of our salvation. When you hear this tune, what do you think? (Mighty Fortress)Luther's phenomenal music has carried his battle text for the Church Militant for almost 500 years. God loves to hear our song! But not just any song, He loves His song of our salvation. The point of church music is not filler so the preacher can rest up between reading the Gospel and preaching the sermon. The point of church music is to proclaim the Gospel in a different way. We have words. We have pictures and colors. We have smells, tastes and textures. And we have music. And it all works together to carry the message of salvation.

We sing loud and strong and the song of the Church has survived the latest silliness that is now dying away as the boomers discover that our fad had no lasting impact and was indeed just another fad. The theology of our God is just too rich and complex to be encased in 3 chords played by 6 strings. Even an entire symphony cannot capture it but it certainly does a better job of

delivering it. The song of the church in rich harmony and complex instrumentation goes on and on until we sing with the choir immortal in paradise. Open your hymnals and sing. Let the words of the texts sweep over you and transcend you lifting you above the mundane of grades and bills and carpets that need vacuuming. Abandon the contemporary things of your life and let the music lift you high enough to get just a glimpse, ever so brief, of your eternal home with God. That is what gives us hope, and comfort and peace in these contemporary struggles with this sin fallen world.