

Chosen
Sermon by Nicole Farley
Winnetka Presbyterian Church
Sunday, January 3, 2010

Psalm 147:12-20

Praise for God's Care for Jerusalem

- ¹² Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
- ¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
- ¹⁴ He grants peace^f within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
- ¹⁵ He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
- ¹⁶ He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
- ¹⁷ He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?
- ¹⁸ He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
- ¹⁹ He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
- ²⁰ He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the LORD!

Jeremiah 31:7-14

The Joyful Return of the Exiles

- ⁷ For thus says the LORD:
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”
- ⁸ See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.
- ⁹ With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,

in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”

¹¹ For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹² They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³ Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

¹⁴ I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

Pray with me.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in
your sight, O Lord, you who are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Both of these readings this morning are beautiful poems, both singing God’s praises
for God’s goodness to Israel. Yes, that’s what I said...both of them...about Israel. The
psalm celebrates one of the historic times that Jerusalem was restored. Jeremiah is
prophesying about a redemption yet to occur but proven as history played out. Not even
one gospel reading, you ask? Well, those are certainly nice stories about our heritage
but what do they really have to do with us today? It’s kind of like genealogy, right?
My great-great-great grandfather running a tavern in Philadelphia is really just an
anecdote with no real bearing on me and my life. Isn’t that kind of like these Hebrew
Bible texts about Israel – good to know but not really going to change my day-to-day

life? I'm sure you know, if *I'm* asking the question, then it's safe to say the answer is "not quite." Finding in the readings the word for all of us today is always the preacher's challenge. Rather than talk you through a side-by-side comparison, though undoubtedly riveting, I thought I might reply in poem. Shall we begin?

Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!

Praise the Lord, O you chosen people! Praise your God, all you have heard the Holy Spirit, who have heeded the call of the Holy Spirit on your heart.

For he strengthens the bars of your gates;

For God shores up where you are weakest;

he blesses your children within you.

God blesses all God's children.

He grants peace within your borders;

God grants God's peace to all who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

he fills you with the finest of wheat.

God fills you with the finest things: hope and joy and peace and love.

He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.

The work of God's word is seen throughout all of creation.

He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

God makes it rain in the desert where no human ever walks; God knows the deepest reaches of the oceans.

He hurls down hail like crumbs – who can stand before his cold?

God composes the melody and harmony of nature – who can come close?

He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.

God speaks and life comes into being; God's Word comes to earth as an infant and the world is saved.

He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel.

God's word is here for all to hear, God's word is for all who wish to receive it.

He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances.
God is visible to all who seek; our faith gives us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to feel.

Praise the Lord!

For thus says the Lord:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,

Sing with joy for our brothers and sisters,

and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;

and rejoice for all those who answer God's call;

proclaim, give praise, and say,

'Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.'

'Save O Lord, your people who mean well, who sometimes tire of trying, who sometimes get caught up in what we think is important,'

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,

See, I am bringing them to me, no matter how far they have wandered, no matter how far from me they feel,

among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together;

among them those who are angry and those who doubt, those who are vulnerable, those in transition, together;

a great company, they shall return here.

all who are chosen, they will find me.

With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back,

With sorrow some come, with self-doubt others, some like the prodigal son, and with love I will comfort them, with love I will support them, I will love them all,

I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;

I will be a bright spot in their hardships, I will not let them down;

for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

for I have known them before they were born, and my loves never diminishes.

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,

Hear the word of the Lord, all who trust in God,

and declare it in the coastlands far away;

and share it with your family, with your friends, with any who could use a good word,

say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.’

say, ‘God who grants us freedom to do as we wish is inviting us home and showing the way to all who will look, all who will trust, all who will believe.’

For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

For the Lord has provided a savior who has broken the bonds of sin, whose gifts are forgiveness, peace, and life eternal.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,

With such good news, no, great news, how can they help but tell others how great is God,

and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,

when they know that they are so loved, the love they share will make God known,

over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd;

through their work, and their families, and through their friendships and their interactions with strangers, with all God’s children;

their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.

their life, though touched with sadness, with loss, with fear and anger, will be bright with God’s love shown in Christian fellowship, kindness, and support.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry.

Then shall the young women smile with the old women, and the young men and the old shall laugh.

I will turn their mourning into joy,

I will turn their mourning into joy truly for death shall no longer be the last word,

I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

I will comfort them through their sadness, be the unexpected moments of joy in their darkness until the happiness outweighs the sorrow and hope again prevails,

I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the Lord.

I will provide even when, especially when, times seem uncertain, and my people, my chosen ones, my children today, not so different from my children of Israel, shall receive what they need, says the Lord.

And all God's people say, "Amen."