No Time for Complacency!

25th Sun. after Pentecost – 11/15/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Zephaniah 1:7-16 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 12, [Yahweh speaks through Zephaniah regarding His actions on "the Day of Yahweh" that is drawing near and says,] **"And I will at that time search Jerusalem and I will punish the men who have lost their taste, the ones saying, 'Yahweh does no good nor does He do evil."**

Introduction

✠ I remember all the way back to the spring semester of my first year of college, in 1980, when I was pursuing my bachelor's degree in Physical Education. I was also living for the first time, apart from my parents, in an apartment with one roommate.

➔ One of my classes at CSU was *Human Anatomy* in a lecture hall with approximately 250 students. It was very detailed, very dry, with a lot of terms I did not understand, right after an early morning PE conditioning class where our bodies were pushed to the edge of physical exhaustion.

➔ Add all of those dynamics together, along with me working past midnight or staying up with friends past midnight each day, meant that my motivation for putting my best into this very difficult class was well below the level it should have been.

➔ As the semester was drawing to a close, I knew that passing the class was going to be close. Yet, even that fact, did not spark my usually high standard for getting good grades to resurface. I allowed the worldly attractions and excuses that were close at hand to make me complacent so that when the final grades came out, I received a big fat *F*. And the next semester I had the privilege of taking the same class all over again.

✠ As we find ourselves here in the last few Sundays of the church year, we are reminded that The Day of the Lord is coming; that Christ will return as He promised which means that our days in this life and on this planet are numbered.

➔ All of those facts add up to one more undeniable truth: A time will come when it is too late for anyone who has rejected God and His offer of salvation to receive that free gift that is offered right now to all. Which is why God speaks to us here in His Word that as the Day of Yahweh draws near there is *No Time for Complacency*!

I. Like Judah, we can easily become complacent

✠ *Complacency*: That's what had happened to the people of Judah in the days of the prophet Zephaniah. He had been sent to those people in the Southern Kingdom of Israel where the residents in the Holy City, Jerusalem, had repeatedly failed to heed God's warnings through His earlier prophets to repent and turn back to God.

➔ And this, in spite of what they saw take place in the Northern Kingdom of Israel for the very same reasons only one generation earlier. No, Judah had turned away from their covenant with God. They had abandoned and desecrated the temple – the very place where God promised to live with them – they were now worshiping false gods and idols.

➔ They turned their back on their neighbor; neglecting the poor and downtrodden among them. Gaining great wealth and living in luxury, they had gotten complacent. When it came to their relationship with God, they thought, "It's in the bag;" we've got it made.

✠ So God proclaims His words of judgment through the prophet Zephaniah. In chapter 1:2 He says, "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth." And here in our text for today, He tells them: "Be silent before the Lord Yahweh! For the day of Yahweh is near. ... And I will at that

time search Jerusalem and I will punish the men who have lost their taste, the ones saying, 'Yahweh does no good nor does He do evil" (vv. 7a, 12).

➔ The phrase that God uses in the original Hebrew for "complacent" is "הקפאים על-שמריהם" ("haqpa-im al shemer-i-ham") which describes wine that has completely lost its taste and potency. That's what God is saying has happened to His people regarding the vibrancy and effectiveness of their faith. They have allowed the things of this world and their self-centeredness to make their faith irrelevant; to make them no longer God's people.

✠ And "the day of Yahweh" is the day when God says He will enact His wrath against them for their sin and complacency. On that day there will be utter destruction: houses laid to waste – built, but not inhabited – vineyards planted from which no wine will be drunk; a day of ruin and devastation; of clouds; thick darkness; and gloom.

➔ All of it happened in 587BC! The people refused to take Zephaniah's warning seriously, and so God had no choice. He turned His people over to the armies of Babylon. Jerusalem was laid waste; the magnificent Temple of Solomon was leveled to its foundations; the population slaughtered; and the survivors dragged off to captivity. That was the price of complacency, just as Zephaniah's message from God had tried to avert.

✠ But, my dear people, these words spoken through the prophet Zephaniah were not only for the people of Judah 2,600 years ago. They are absolutely given for us here today as well, because it is still extremely easy to fall into complacency; to become "tasteless" in our faith.

➔ We too can think that we have done enough to accomplish a task or receive credit or fulfill a duty, and so, we quit trying. We also can look at our faith history and think, "It's in the bag." There isn't one of us here who hasn't, at one time or another, fallen into complacency in life – whether it's in our job, or our marriage, or our health, or, yes, even in our relationship with God.

➔ For example, we might say or believe, "I've been baptized. I've been confirmed. I've checked the essential boxes so that God and I are good." "So, I don't need to go to church or Bible study every Sunday. I don't need the Lord's Supper. I don't need to follow God's will or Commands; I don't need to confess my sins each week." Not only is that kind of attitude very dangerous, it's just plain sinful!

✠ Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism under the Third Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." He says that this means, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." And when we don't, we are breaking God's Law. Jesus says to us all, "This is My body. ... This is My blood. ... Do this in remembrance of Me." Those aren't mere <u>suggestions</u> for us to consider, are they?

➔ He also said that we are to love one another; to love our neighbor; to help those in need. Do we do this? Or are we complacent? We all have family members or co-workers or neighbors or fellow Christians who are having a hard time keeping up with their groceries or yard work or are lonely or hurting in some way or maybe struggling with anger and simply need someone to show that they still are loved. Yet, the temptation of complacency wants us to say, "I can help her some other time." "I help folks in other ways." "Somebody else will give him a hand." Or "That's why we pay taxes." If we fall to that temptation and refuse to obey Jesus' words, that's when we sin!

✠ So yes, I'm afraid we all are complacent – too much of the time. Therefore, we're all under the judgment of God for our sins.

II. God is not complacent in sending Jesus to save us

✠ Is there hope for us poor sinners? Yes, there certainly is!

✠ Later in the book of Zephaniah God says this, “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Yahweh has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. ... Yahweh your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing” (Zeph. 3:14–15, 17).

➔ Who is this Mighty One who will save? He is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus, whose name means “Yahweh Saves,” has come into the world, born in human flesh, to take upon Himself the sins of the entire world for all time. He took all of God’s wrath on our behalf, which meant His suffering and death upon the cross. And as we know, even death could not hold Him so, that in His victorious resurrection, God’s judgment against we believers in Christ would not stand.

➔ All of that was put on Jesus – including our sins of complacency – all the times we lived as if we had it in the bag; all the times we neglected the gifts of God’s grace that He gives freely to us in the Word and Sacrament; all the times we have ignored our neighbors and family and others who are in need.

✠ Yes, even those times that we fall into the same common sin as those whom God convicts in verse 12; whose complacency concocted the excuse that God simply doesn’t care about us in this life of difficulty and pain. They said, “Yahweh does no good nor does He do evil.” That’s really just the first step toward atheism, isn’t it? Because to believe that God is not actively involved in the matters of this earthly life is to deny that there is any true god at all.

➔ But Jesus came; He came to this earth precisely to show us all, in the flesh, that God does care about us; that He is active to the point of His own sacrificial death in our place; for our forgiveness; for our eternal salvation; so that we can be with Him every day into eternity in the New Heaven and New Earth that is to come on the great Day of Yahweh! Until that day, He speaks to us here daily in His perfect Word; He washes us daily in the grace-filled water of our baptism; and He feeds and strengthens us weekly in His body and blood in Holy Communion. What wonderful gifts; what great assurances that He is active and with us every day!

Conclusion

✠ My college story continued almost ten years later, when, in 1989 I was in the first quarter of my pursuit, now to enter into the public ministry. The class was much more difficult than *Human Anatomy*. It was now the first of four quarters of *Biblical Greek*. Though different, the earthly temptations and pressures were all still there. Now I was a husband; a father of two children under three; with a part time job and more.

➔ But now my motivation was centered firmly in my faith in Jesus and my desire to serve Him in all of those earthly roles that I just mentioned plus the goal of serving Him in the future in His Church. And trust me, Mary Beth can attest to this, I was tempted more than once by Satan, to just give up; to say, “This is too hard;” to think “Where is God at because I just can’t do this.”

✠ But God proved His presence and His love. His strength and activity was with me and our entire family over and over again; in small and in mighty and miraculous ways. And He has been doing that now for all 30 of the years that He has allowed me to serve as a pastor here in His Church.

➔ Because trust me, my fellow Christians, Satan still places that temptation of complacency in front of me, just as he does each of you, on a regular basis.

✠ And that is why every day and every week, we must fall before our gracious God, in humility and in repentance and in faith and see that today is indeed, *No Time for Complacency* at all.

➔ No, as Paul said in our Epistle Reading, we "are not in darkness…for we are all children of light" (1 Thes. 5:4-5) only by the gracious work of Jesus in our place; only by the mighty Holy Spirit working within our hearts, minds and souls.

➔ It is by His gracious presence that we all must "put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for the helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thes. 5:8) as Paul encourages us to do every day.

✠ For the Day of Yahweh is drawing near for each of us. With every breath we take, we are one second closer to that time that only God knows and determines. Yet by staying steadfast in the gifts He has given to us, you can remain confident and ready in the assurance that God loves you; that He has saved you, and, when that day comes, on account of Jesus, He will take you to be with Him in His kingdom forevermore. Amen.