

A Song of Joy – Zephaniah 3:14-20

¹⁴ Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! ¹⁵ The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak." ¹⁷ The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing ¹⁸as on a day of festival." I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. ¹⁹ I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. ²⁰ At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; 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.

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Home. We're just a few days away from the time when many will make the annual trek "home for the holidays," if they haven't already. Home. So much nostalgia this time of the year: of possibly returning to the home in which we were raised; time spent with siblings, parents, or grandchildren; celebrating the family traditions that have been passed on to the multiple generations; attending candlelight Christmas Eve worship together; eating the candy and homemade decorated cookies made from the family recipes; lounging all day in pajama bottoms with the classic Christmas movies playing in the background. So much warmth and comfort in this image. So much joy.

Of course, these are the images and feelings that arise for many who have "home" to go to. But for others, this time of the year may emphasize their "homelessness." For people who live on the streets or in their cars, home is a luxury they may only dream of. Why, even Mary and Joseph were told, in Joseph's hometown no less, there was no room for them. For others, home has been shattered due to divorce and their energy gets spent divided between homes. This year my personal sense of home feels different, as my family still grieves the loss of my father just a little over a year ago. Home for the holidays, for some, doesn't exude the warm, comforting images like it does for so many, but instead emphasizes the feelings of loss, loneliness, poverty and coldness.

Although Zephaniah was an Old Testament writer speaking to a different crowd with different circumstances, we, as Christians, hear his words through the filter of Jesus, who opens his loving arms to all (in whatever circumstances we might be experiencing) and tells us that "*in my Father's house there are many rooms*" and that "*if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*" In Jesus we are never homeless, as he gathers us all together in an *eternal* home, reunited with our families, and filled with love, wholeness, and *eternal* joy! May we ALL experience this peace, joy, and comfort that Jesus gives us this Christmas.

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