ZEPHANIAH 1:7-16
THE SILENT SACRIFICE

Recently I talked with someone about coming to church. They said they would come on Thanksgiving Sunday. I waited. I delayed starting, and waited, but they never showed. They have yet to attend one service in the time I've been here. So, I talked with them again, and they said they forgot, they get drawn to their hobbies. Other things in life call them. They admitted that they've become lazy and complacent when it comes to attending church. I had already read our text and was planning on preaching on it, but hadn't prepared anything to be able to tell them what God thinks of those who have become complacent regarding Him.

This text doesn't offer any hope for the complacent. The entire reading is a warning. It was written initially for the people of Judah. They had become complacent regarding God. They had repeatedly failed to heed the warnings of the prophets to repent and turn back to God. They had witnessed the Northern Kingdom of Israel taken away into captivity by the Assyrians, but they had the attitude we all have at times: "It's not going to happen to me."

They had the Temple in Jerusalem, but they had rejected it. They abandoned and desecrated it. They had turned to superstitions and false gods. They had gotten complacent regarding their relationship with the Lord their God. God was just there as an afterthought, not for good, and not for ill, but just there. God wasn't going to punish them, or so they thought, until they were dragged off into captivity in Babylon.

These words spoken by God through the prophet Zephaniah weren't only for the people of Judah 2,600 years ago, but they are for us today as well. It's easy to fall into complacency. We think we've done enough to accomplish a task and things are good enough, and so we quit trying. We think, "I've got salvation with Jesus, why do I need to go to church?" Most of us at one time or another have fallen into complacency in life — whether in our job, our marriage, health, or even in our relationship with God.

We Christians tend to grow complacent in our relationship with God. We skip church and Bible study, finding other, more pressing matters to attend to. We don't avail ourselves of God's wonderful gifts of Word and Sacrament, the means of grace. Our Bibles sit closed on the shelf too much of the time, perhaps even gathering dust! The end of the church year should always remind us that our world will come to an end, we will die, and Christ will return. There should be an urgency in our lives to feed our faith daily.

Yet, like Judah, we can become complacent in our relationship with God. We can think such things as: "I've been baptized. I've been confirmed. God and I are good. I don't need to go to church to be a Christian or study the Bible

to know what God says. I don't need the Lord's Supper to strengthen my faith. I don't need to confess my sins each week. God forgives me anyways." Not only are such attitudes dangerous, they're sinful!

Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism under the Third Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy." 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." When we don't, we're breaking God's Law, and we're breaking God's heart.

We've all become complacent in our relationship with God. Too much of the time we feel satisfied with the way things are and we have little desire to grow in our faith. Complacency involves overindulgence in comfort, which leads to laziness and neglect. For the people of Judah the danger was God's punishment sending them away into exile and captivity in Babylon. When God was saying in our text that He was preparing a sacrifice, they were the sacrifice

So, when we read this today is there hope for us? Indeed, there is! God goes on to speak through Zephaniah, "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. . . . The Lord 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" (3:14–15, 17).

Who is this Mighty One who will save us? He is none other than the Lord Jesus. Jesus, whose name means "The Lord Saves," has come into the world, born in the flesh, to take upon Himself the sins of the world. Jesus took the wrath of God on our behalf suffering death upon the cross and being raised again, so that by faith in Jesus God's judgment against us rests on Jesus. All your sins of complacency — all the times you lived as if you didn't need a closer relationship with God, all the times you neglected the gifts of God's grace that are freely given in His Word and Sacrament has been put on Jesus.

In our text the people of Judah were the sacrifice because of their complacency in their relationship with God. Yet, complacency can have other meanings than the intended meaning of our text. To be complacent can also mean to be obedient, ready to accept instruction, to be lamblike. When I first read the text and read that the Lord had prepared a sacrifice, I didn't think that it would be the people of Judah. I had already jumped ahead to another complacent silent sacrifice, maybe you did too. Maybe a verse from Isaiah came to your minds as well: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (53:7).

Maybe you also thought of Jesus, silent and lamblike before Pontius Pilate. Jesus was God's other sacrifice that He prepared for us. On the day of that sacrifice God did punish not only the sins of the people of Judah, but also the sins of all people for all time, yours and mine. All sins and their punishment were paid for and not just those that are mentioned in our text. If I was to detail the sins of our text from superstitions, to cheating people in the market place, to violence you might say that those don't include your sins. Well don't worry, your sins are included in Jesus' death for you. Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross and His resurrection pays for all your sins. It brings you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This forgiveness won for us by Jesus' death and resurrection is now given to us in what we call the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness becomes ours as we hear and believe His Gospel promises and receive His holy body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

Now is the time to return to the Lord, to hear His Gospel promises each week, to receive the body and blood of Jesus shed for the forgiveness of your sins, to study His Holy Word and grow closer to Him. Dear friends in Christ, this time of the church year is a reminder not to become complacent in our faith. God's gifts are here for you. God wasn't and isn't complacent about us. He searches for each lost sheep. He pursues you with His love. When it comes to our salvation, God's attitude is anything but complacent! Rather, He goes the full distance for us. In the fullness of time, He sent His Son to save you because He loves you. And He continues to distribute His grace abundantly to us each day. We don't have to work for it. It's all done for us by Christ Jesus. We simply receive it by faith.

In a few weeks we begin a new church year on the First Sunday in Advent – November 29th. How about making a New Year's resolution, Christian style? Make a commitment for the next Church year to be more consistent and loyal in church attendance — to hear the preaching of the Word and receive the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood regularly. Make a resolution to start coming to Bible Studies on Wednesday mornings. Make a commitment to a daily life of regular devotions and prayers at home. Pray for those who are complacent in their faith, like the person I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, and that all of our members will shed their complacency and return to the Lord their God.

The Day of the Lord is drawing nearer for each of us. With every new dawn, it's one day closer. With every breath we take, we're closer to that time that only God determines. Be ready in faith. Live joyfully and confidently each day, serving God and one another, knowing that God loves you, He has saved you, and, when that day comes, on account of Jesus, He will take you to be with Him to live in His kingdom forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.