

Lectionary Readings: Zechariah 1:18-21; Psalm 41:1-413; 2 Corinthians 12:7-12; Mark 8:27-38

Sermon Title: *It's Tool Time*

Prayer: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of [our] heart[s] be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, [our] Rock and [our] Redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

Salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 1:2)

Text: The Word from God through which the Holy Spirit comes to stir our hearts for the First Sunday in Lent is from our Old Testament Reading: Zechariah, chapter 1.

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: *"It's Tool Time."* In the 1990s this expression was made famous by a TV sitcom called *Home Improvement* starring Tim Allen. Each episode included Tim's home improvement show, called *Tool Time*, which was a show-within-a-show.

Tim was joined on the program by his friend and mild-mannered assistant Al Borland. They were introduced with the question: *"Does everybody know what time it is?"* And the response was always: *"It's Tool Time!"*

I. The prophet Zechariah was also concerned about time and tools. The three dates in his book (Zechariah 1:1; 1:7; 7:1) make that clear. In each of the three references, Darius the Persian is the reigning monarch. And, it's a time of discouragement and despair, as God's people had just come out of 70 years' worth of persecution and affliction.

So, one-night God gave Zechariah eight visions – *"Oh What a Night!"* In the second vision God shows the prophet four craftsmen (our text for today). We can summarize its gist in three words—*"It's Tool Time!"*

That might have sounded strange to Zechariah's contemporaries. We wouldn't be surprised if they were a bit cynical and sarcastic, especially when we understand more about the *"four horns"* – *"the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem"* (Zechariah 1:19).

Moses helps us in Deuteronomy 33:17, when he describes Joseph with these words:

"In majesty he is like a firstborn bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations."

To have horns, then, is to rip and tear apart your enemies.

The prophet employs the term, *"horn,"* five times in his second vision. What do *"four horns,"* symbolize? The number four refers to all of the nations hostile to Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. Therefore, horns may be likened to nuclear warheads of our day that wreak destruction, devastation and death. Or, as the prophet puts it, they *"scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."*

And the solution is four craftsmen? *“It’s Tool Time”*? Really? The Judeans probably said: *“Zechariah, dream on!”*

II. You know the feeling. Trying to defeat enemies that assault and scatter you and your family using the tools of God’s Word sometimes seems pointless. We often hear voices that say:

“Everyone with their head on straight and eyes wide open knows that reading the Bible doesn’t change a darn thing. It’s a quaint, antiquated activity that is completely irrelevant. The real movers and shakers are generals in the war room, politicians in Washington and investment bankers on Wall Street. Studying the Bible, singing hymns and getting involved in a church is a waste of time.”

And so:

- We shuffle off to worship with our shoulders slumped and our spirits downcast.
- We walk into the sanctuary to put in our time, do our duty, and then we go home, defeated and discouraged.

Craftsmen? Hardly! We don’t stand a chance against *“the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem”* (Zechariah 1:19).

Though the ESV renders the Hebrew word *charashim* (v 20) in our text with **“craftsmen,”** the NRSV translates *charashim* with **“blacksmiths.”** Mmm ... I think that the NRSV is on to something. Don’t you? Doesn’t *“blacksmith”* sound better, more powerful? Yes, maybe we have a chance against the horns after all! Let’s go with blacksmiths. Don’t you feel better already?

We can post this on our website:

“At St. James and St. Paul’s Lutheran churches, our members are like blacksmiths with strong hands and bulging biceps! They are strong-muscled people who emerge from worship with sweat on their brow and fire in their eyes!”

As if to say: *“We aren’t craftsmen with pliers and screwdrivers. We’re blacksmiths with sludge hammers and blowtorches! Ya!”*

Too bad that’s not what Zechariah means. Sure, *charashim* may refer to blacksmiths in some texts. However, the prophet’s second vision isn’t about pulverizing metal, it’s about building the temple. The translation **“craftsmen”** is confirmed by the adjacent visions in chapters one and two:

- In 1:16, the LORD says: *“My house will be rebuilt.”*
- While in the third vision, the prophet sees a young man with a measuring line in his hand, getting ready to build (2:1-2).

In fact, all eight of the prophet’s visions are connected to rebuilding the temple. So, as much as we want to see ourselves as blacksmiths, it’s not the right translation.

III. This means we're back where we started. Craftsmen taking on the big, bad, beastly horns:

- This is Moses against Pharaoh.
- Joshua against Jericho.
- Amos against Amaziah.
- This is weakness in the face of massive power.

And that's exactly the point. God's power is shown most perfect in weakness (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-12). Evil isn't brought down by military hardware, political gamesmanship, or by cutting edge investments. No, the scattering horns meet their match against craftsmen building God's temple with plumb lines and sawhorses.

Don't believe me? Zechariah's second vision ends with these words: "*The craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations*" (Zechariah 1:21). When the temple goes up the horns go down!

"*Horns*" appears five times in this vision, while Zechariah mentions "*craftsmen*" once. We may think that the craftsmen are outnumbered and outmanned. Think again! – "*Nothing can hinder God from saving by many or by few*" (1 Samuel 14:6).

You see, God defeats *every* enemy in the book of Zechariah!

- At the top of the list is Satan, the prosecuting attorney (3:2).
- Sin also meets its match throughout the book. It is taken away (3:5), destroyed (5:4), removed (5:9-11) and washed away (13:1).
- In 9:1-8 God marches from the north to the south, overthrowing each enemy in turn. Damascus, Hamath, Tyre, Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod all fall before Lord Yahweh.

All of this previews and predicts Christ's (the master Craftsman's) Easter victory when He defeats *every* enemy in the universe – every dragon, devil, all darkness, and even death!

IV. There once was another group of people that also didn't look like much. They were clumsy, hardheaded and forgetful. Their leader knew more about bass fish and boat docks than He did about Roman culture and Greek language. His cronies weren't sophisticated, nor did they have any formal education. Consider:

- Were they humble? No. They jockeyed for cabinet positions (Mark 10:35-37).
- Were they loyal? No. Once, at the worst possible moment, their three leaders fell fast asleep (Mark 14:32-42).
- However, I know, they were sensitive to the needs of others, right? Two of them called "*the Sons of Thunder*" once wanted their enemies torched with fire (Luke 9:54).

You see, before Jesus came along the disciples:

- Were as we might say: loading trucks, coaching kids' soccer, and giving out free samples at Kwik Trip.
- Their collars were blue, and their hearts were hard and there is no evidence that Jesus chose them because they were smarter or nicer than the other guys down the block.

But they launched a movement that began to bring down the powers of this present evil age.

And get this. Zechariah's "*Tool Time*" was a part of their message. Only these tools weren't used to build up. They were used to tear down. You see, tools of torture were used against the Good Shepherd. Zechariah writes: "*Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*" (13:7b).

What are the tools? A blindfold, a whip, some thorns, a purple robe, a hammer, some nails and finally a spear. No, this isn't a syrupy, sentimental love. Rather, it's a fierce love for you – written in the blood of the Lamb.

From Zechariah we also know that, when the LORD is present, destroyed temples are rebuilt. So, on the third day Jesus – *the* Temple – was alive forevermore! When the temple goes up the horns go down! Jesus conquered the powers of death and demons, devils and darkness. Then He announced a building program.

And for that building program, the great Craftsman is looking for:

- Humble people, not the proud.
- The weak, not the strong.
- Sick people, not the healthy.
- Davids not Goliaths.

Blacksmiths need not apply. Craftsmen, on the other hand, are most welcome. Craftsmen:

- Who humbly lay the foundation of Christ crucified for sinners.
- Who carefully build on it with the dynamic theology of our church.
- And, who faithfully repair it with the fruit of the Spirit.

And they do it all with great vim and vigor, joy and delight.

Conclusion: Dear friends in Christ, all of which is to say, we know what time it is. "*It's Tool Time!*" Let's build!

In the name of ✠ Jesus, Who forgives all your sins. Amen.

To God alone the Glory!