

Isaiah 61

A reading from the 61st chapter of Isaiah beginning at the first verse.

The Spirit of God, the Master, is on me because God anointed me.
He sent me to preach good news to the poor, heal the heartbroken,
Announce freedom to all captives,
pardon all prisoners.

God sent me to announce the year of his grace, a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies and to comfort all who mourn,
To care for the needs of all who mourn in Zion, give them bouquets of roses instead of ashes, messages of joy instead of news of doom, a praising heart instead of a languid spirit.

Rename them "Oaks of Righteousness" planted by God to display his glory.
They'll rebuild the old ruins, raise a new city out of the wreckage.
They'll start over on the ruined cities, take the rubble left behind and make it new.

You'll hire outsiders to herd your flocks and foreigners to work your fields,
But you'll have the title "Priests of God," honored as ministers of our God.

You'll feast on the bounty of nations, you'll bask in their glory.
Because you got a double dose of trouble and more than your share of contempt,
Your inheritance in the land will be doubled and your joy go on forever.

"Because I, God, love fair dealing and hate thievery and crime,
I'll pay your wages on time and in full, and establish my eternal covenant with you.

Your descendants will become well-known all over.

Your children in foreign countries
Will be recognized at once as the people I have blessed."

I will sing for joy in God, explode in
praise from deep in my soul!
He dressed me up in a suit of
salvation, he outfitted me in a robe
of righteousness, as a bridegroom
who puts on a tuxedo and a bride a
jeweled tiara.

For as the earth bursts with spring
wildflowers, and as a garden
cascades with blossoms,

So the Master, God, brings
righteousness into full bloom and
puts praise on display before the
nations.

The Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Let us pray.

Spirit of the Lord God,
You bring good news to the
oppressed, bind up the
brokenhearted, proclaim liberty
to the captives, and release the
prisoners. You comfort all who
mourn, and shower your people
with the oil of gladness instead
of mourning; a mantle of praise
instead of a faint spirit. We will
greatly rejoice in the Lord, our
whole being shall exult in God,
for the sake of the one who
brought righteousness to life,
Jesus Christ our salvation.
Amen.

Don't you just love being the
bearer of good news? Think
about how you felt the last time
you had something great to
share. I know I feel just so filled

with joy that I feel like I going to
burst until I finally get to share
my good news. It seems to take
over my entire body.

Well, when I read this passage
from Isaiah, I can just feel the
excitement and joy in Isaiah's
message as he finally has some
good news from God to share in
the midst of the frustration and
the disappoint that the people
were experiencing as they have
returned to their homeland. As
we all think about going back to
the way things were before any
tragedy strikes, we all think
things will be the same. We will
pick up right where we left off.
But, in reality that is seldom the
case.

For the Israelites their beloved
temple had been destroyed, some
of their families and friends did
not survive through their time in

exile, their land had not been taken care of, and pretty much everything was in shambles. Not the image of what life would be like when and if they were able to return from exile.

But in spite of the rubble and devastation of their homeland that they saw all around them, Isaiah has a message from God that is a message of hope and healing and restoration. And Isaiah is bursting at the seams to share the good news with all those who have suffered through being exiled and now the devastation they have found upon their return.

This message from God is not a promise that life will return to the way it had been, but rather this is a message of hope for the life that God intended for all people. Those who have been taken advantage of, those who had been imprisoned, those who had suffered the loss of loved ones and relationships will be

the beneficiaries of what God is about to do.

God will give them bouquets of roses instead of ashes. The oppressed and downtrodden and heartbroken will hear messages of joy instead of messages of doom. Their heads will not be filled with fear and anxiety, but their hearts will be filled with joy.

And they are not to mourn what no longer is, but they are to be excited and enthused about building a new city. For they are to take the rubble and transform it into new dwellings, new gathering places and new sacred spaces.

And they will take on new practices as they will include others into their community as they invite outsiders and foreigners to herd their cattle and work in their fields.

And because they had it so rough being separated from one another and made to live in places that did not honor their heritage. Their inheritance will be doubled and their joy will not be short-lived, but will go on forever.

The Israelites have waited for so long for their God to act and here is the message that it just might be the time that God is about to fulfill his promise of the new eternal covenant that had been prophesized through the prophet Jeremiah. As God said that God would establish a new covenant and through this new covenant you will get to know of my true character and it will be written on your heart. And through this new covenant your sins will not only be forgiven, but also forgotten. The time is near when this covenant will be fulfilled and you will be dressed in a robe of righteousness.

And not only will God's relationship with all humanity

be restored, but all creation will be renewed and restored as the earth will burst forth with wild flowers and the gardens cascade with blossoms.

For the Lord will bring righteous into full bloom and put praise on display before all nations.

When I read this passage, I am filled with hope and joy because I hear God saying not just Happy Days will be here again, but that the Kingdom that we pray may one day come, is about to be unveiled to us.

This is most certainly good news!! Not just because the Israelites were able to envision a future that seemed to resolve all the challenges of their present reality.

But, this is good news, because it reveals and reminds the descendants of Abraham that: their God is a God who has never left them or forsaken them, their

God is a God who has not forgotten about the promises that God has made to their ancestors, their God is a God who is alerting them that God has every intention in God's own way and in God's own time of fulfilling God's promise of a new covenant and a king of David's line to rule God's people.

So, this morning let us hear these words of hope and feel Isaiah's joy to be the one chosen to share this good news, not only to the Israelites who have returned to their devastated homeland, but as an Advent message to prepare us for the coming of the King.

And especially this year, where it seems that our lives have been

turned upside down, hear these words of hope as spoken through the prophet Isaiah and trust that God is here with us, trust that God will be with us when this is over, and trust that God will be guiding us to restore and renew relationships, communities, livelihoods and connections from the rubble that this pandemic has created.

So, let us live in the joy of Isaiah's message of hope and let us rejoice that we too have Good News to share with all of the world, for the Savior of the world will soon be here.

AMEN

Blessing

May the quiet fire of God's love

Arise in you.

May its flame of joy and peace

Enlighten your steps in the world

And may you be like the burning bush,

The presence of God for each other.

That holy healing light of love,

The breath of God made manifest

In you.

AMEN

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