

Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 27, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Isaiah 61:1-6 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2) to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3) and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. 4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5) Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 6) And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

Dear People of God,

It must have been an exciting day back in Nazareth when Jesus returned home and went to the synagogue. People in the surrounding villages and cities had been praising him. Now they would have their opportunity to discover why everyone was so excited. Close your eyes and try to imagine the scene. When he stood up to read, the attendant handed him a Bible. Jesus carefully unrolled the scroll of the book of Isaiah that had been handed to him. He knew what he was looking for. He wanted to find the place where Isaiah had recorded him speaking about his mission as the anointed one – the Messiah, the Christ. He paused when he got to the words of our Old Testament lesson and then he read them for all to hear.

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After carefully rolling up the scroll, he returned it to the attendant and sat down. **The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** (Luke 4:20-21 NIV)

With those words, Jesus announced that he was the Lord's anointed one! He was the one who had spoken through Isaiah to assure God's people of the Lord's comfort and strength. Jesus used those words to introduce himself as the eternal son of God and to explain his mission as the one whom had been sent as the anointed one to God's people.

What an exciting day it is for us to have the opportunity to reflect on the words of our text and to be reminded that

Theme: The Lord Sent His Anointed One

1. To bring words of comfort to his people
2. To enable his people to serve him

Close your eyes and listen to Jesus – the anointed one sent by the Lord to bring you words of comfort. **The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2) to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3) and provide for those who grieve in Zion—** (If you closed your eyes, you may open them again.)

Jesus addressed his words to the poor, the broken hearted, to those held captive and imprisoned, to those who mourn and grieve. It will help us to better appreciate the comfort these words proclaim to us when we understand the context of these words as they were first written by Isaiah. Isaiah had foretold that the Jews would be carried off into exile in Babylon. These words of Isaiah were written to assure the prisoners in exile that the Lord would bring about their release and freedom. But that was just part of the picture. The complete freedom, release and healing would come to God's people through the Savior the Lord promised to send to his people. Jesus was sent by his heavenly Father to fulfill these words.

These words offer us comfort when we see ourselves numbered among the poor, the broken hearted, the captive, the imprisoned, mourning, and grieving people whom Jesus addressed. Jesus came to seek and to save sinners. He came to share the good news of salvation with those who are spiritually poor. We have come before the Lord today as spiritual beggars – confessing that we have been disobedient in thoughts, words and actions and that we deserve the Lord's punishment both now and in eternity. We have come into God's presence with nothing but our sins. We have come as empty vessels before God and we look to him to fill our cups with the righteousness of Christ. The Lord Jesus has good news for us: he is here to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.

These pictures help us to understand what Jesus has done for us. God's people were carted off to another land to live as exiles under the rule of a foreign government. All men were captives of Satan through sin. But Jesus brings them freedom from this captivity. This freedom and release is another way of speaking of forgiveness. It tells us that Jesus sent our sins away – out of God's sight – forever.

Jesus also gives sight to the blind. Now those who were spiritually blind can see their sin, their rebellion, and their damning guilt. But more than that through the preaching of the good news they see their Savior. And as they see Jesus, they see themselves in a new light. When Jesus is revealed to them, they see with rejoicing that they stand "pure and fresh and sinless in God's holy eyes!" (TLH 654:7) We rejoice to see ourselves in this way!

Jesus also provides us with a release from oppression. The Jews in Babylon were not only exiles in a strange land. They were oppressed under the rule of heathen kings. But even worse they were oppressed in spirit. The devout among them felt the weight and the guilt of the sins of their nation. What joy surged through their hearts when they were released and set free to return to their homeland with the city of Jerusalem -- which symbolized the dwelling place of their God. God was smiling on them again.

When our souls are aching and groaning under a load of sin and our conscience will not stop making us feel guilty our pastor speaks to us in Jesus name at the beginning of our service and assures us of his forgiveness. With the words of the final blessing, I dismiss you to go forth with the joy and confidence that God is smiling upon you. What joy fills our hearts as the Lord lifts those burdens from us!

We are living in the year of the Lord's favor! In Old Testament times, God's people would celebrate a year of Jubilee every 50 years. According to Leviticus, slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and the mercies of God would be particularly evident. The people would neither plant nor harvest during this year – they would enjoy the Lord's abundant blessings from previous years. (cf. Leviticus 25:8-55)

In our text, Jesus speaks about some of the provisions he has graciously provided to us. Jesus promised his people **a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.** Here we see the complete love of the Lord's anointed one for his people.

Individuals like Job and Jonah in the Old Testament used ashes to indicate mourning and repentance. Why not close your eyes and picture someone sitting in torn clothes in the ashes of a campfire. Now blink and imagine someone dressed in royal robes or clothing and wearing a beautiful crown or garland of flowers in their hair. That's the transformation, if you will, that Jesus has provided to us. He took us from the "ash heap" of sin, washed us with his blood, and clothed us with the beauty of his righteousness. (cf. Revelation 1:5, Galatians 3:27) It's no wonder that Jesus says that we will be called **oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.**

Once again, our text uses a wonderful picture to comfort us. Each of us was conceived and born in sin. There was nothing about us that was right. We were 'dead' in our trespasses and sins. How wonderful it is for us to hear Jesus tell us that we will be oaks of righteousness planted by the Lord so we can display his splendor. Jesus describes us as a strong, healthy, vibrant, beautiful, majestic, and enduring tree – perfectly shaped and admired by all who see it.

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They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5) Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.

Don't forget that these words were originally addressed to the captives of Israel whose homeland had been devastated by foreigners. The Lord assures them that one day the ruins of their cities will be revitalized and restored. The rural areas around their cities will also thrive. Flocks of animals will fill the hillsides. The fields and vineyards will be green. One could understand these words as physically fulfilled by Cyrus and the Persian government, which returned the land to the Israelites – but in this context there is a more complete fulfillment. The Lord is addressing his people and speaking of a time when "aliens and foreigner" (gentile converts) will be included as members of the Lord' church and will carry serve him as they do his work and delight in offering their gifts as praise to their Savior God.

The Apostle Paul describes a more complete fulfillment of these words when he describes the Gentiles as sharing the Jews spiritual blessings. (cf. Romans 15:27) He reminds us that **we are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. (21) In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. (22) And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.** (Ephesians 2:19-22 NIV)

The Lord's anointed one continues speaking to his people. **You will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.** This verse looks back to a promise God made to his people at the time of Moses. **You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** (Exodus 19:6 NIV) Once again, the pages of the New Testament help us to see the fulfillment of the words spoken by the anointed one. **But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** (1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

The Lord's anointed one has enabled us to serve him by **shedding his blood and offering himself unblemished to God, to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!** (cf. Hebrews 9:14 NIV) We are ministers of God sent to share the Good News of salvation and

forgiveness with the world. We offer our lives as spiritual sacrifices as the Apostle Paul urges us: **I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is your true and proper worship.** (Romans 12:1 NIV)

As we use the resources of time, treasure and talent that the Lord has entrusted to us for the benefit of the Lord's church the words of the anointed one regarding the wealth and the riches of the nations being at the disposal of God's people are fulfilled.

We began our discussion of this text by closing our eyes and trying to imagine the scene in Nazareth when Jesus read the words of our text from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Let's close by closing our eyes once again and listening to the Lord's anointed one speak to us: **The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me ... to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2) to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3) and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. 4) They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5) Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 6) And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.**

Dear people of God, today these words are being fulfilled among us! The Lord has sent his anointed one to speak words of comfort to us and to enable us to serve him. Amen.