

**+ Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11 + Celebrate the Jubilee of God's Anointed! +
+ 3rd Sunday in Advent - Jubilee Sunday + 14 December 2008 +**

A text like Isaiah 61 shouldn't just be read. Somehow that seems too ordinary. Wouldn't it be better to have a group of trumpeters play a little fanfare before we read the text? Sounds funny, but it isn't that far-fetched. In Isaiah 61, we have the proclamation of the long-expected Messiah—God's Anointed Savior-King. This proclamation brings important words of comfort and hope to God's hurting people. Wouldn't it then be appropriate to sound a stirring fanfare to call us to pay attention?

Another reason for suggesting a fanfare is that the Messiah evokes the images and terminology of the ancient Year of Jubilee. His proclamation echoes the freedom and forgiveness declared every Year of Jubilee, a year always announced with trumpets. Even our word "jubilee" comes from the Hebrew word for trumpet—*yobel*. So sounding the trumpets before our text would be very appropriate for here Christ encourages us, **CELEBRATE THE JUBILEE OF GOD'S ANOINTED!**

As Isaiah peered down the long corridors of history, he didn't simply say, "When the Savior comes, he's going to do something." Instead the Holy Spirit through Isaiah put words into the mouth of Jesus. That way God's Old Testament people could hear for themselves the loving way the Savior would speak. Just listen. ***"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach 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, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion."***

Did you notice the first thing Christ says? He begins by announcing, ***"The LORD has anointed me."*** In one sense the Messiah wouldn't have to say that. The name "Messiah" in Hebrew and "Christ" in Greek both mean "God's Anointed One." To be anointed means to be set apart for a special office. Kings and priests were anointed or inducted into office as oil was poured over their heads. The Messiah, however, was anointed ***"with the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD."*** Seven hundred years later this prophecy was fulfilled at Jesus' baptism, where he was anointed by the Holy Spirit to carry out the office of Savior of the world.

To explain this, the Messiah uses several pictures. ***"The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."*** Isn't that word "poor" an accurate, but unsettling description of what each of us is spiritually? Regardless of our personal economic status, every one of us is spiritually ***"poor"*** before the holy God. Before God, we have nothing to offer, except the filthy, tattered rags of our personal sins. By nature, we're all "beggars" who need the ***"good news"*** of the Messiah.

That becomes even clearer in his next picture. Christ comes to ***"bind up the brokenhearted."*** That's true of each of us. ***"Brokenhearted"*** means "to be troubled or disturbed in heart" or "to have a heart or conscience that gives no rest." You and I can identify with that. Sometimes we try to hide or ignore the seriousness of our sins, but even if we seem successful, the memory still plagues us or the ease of slipping back into sin disturbs us. The growing burden of guilt and shame almost completely crushes us, but God's Anointed comes to bring healing to our broken hearts.

The Messiah adds to this thought. Jesus says he's come ***"to proclaim freedom to the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."*** How serious and enslaving our sins are! Sin takes us "captive" by putting us under Satan's power as his slaves and giving him control over our lives. By nature, we're in a dark prison of death from which we can never escape—a death sentence of eternal separation from God's love in the horrors of hell.

That reality is terrifying, but the Messiah has a most comforting response. Jesus was anointed to bring good news to spiritual beggars, to heal the brokenhearted with the soothing balm of forgiveness, and to free those who were once slaves or prisoners of sin. His whole purpose in coming was to change completely our sorrowful situation and usher in a whole new era.

Christ shows how completely he changes the old order when he says he's come ***"to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor."*** Don't miss the imagery here. Isaiah's first audience would've picked up on it. They would've recognized the Messiah's "Year of Jubilee" language. Every fifty years, the Israelites celebrated the Year of Jubilee. All debts were forgiven. All slaves were freed and all inherited land was returned to its original owner. The past was forgiven and forgotten, and everyone received a new beginning.

Do the Savior's words bring comfort and assurance to your heart? We were the sad, pathetic people he describes. We were the beggars, the brokenhearted, the enslaved, the prisoners, the people who had lost their heavenly inheritance. We were those people because of the sins we committed so casually or considered not worth mentioning. Helpless we couldn't free ourselves from sin or disperse the dark clouds of mourning.

...But God's Anointed did what we could never do. He ushered in our Year of Jubilee. He canceled our debt of sin. He burst open the prison door of death. He restored our inheritance in heaven. He brought a new era! We, who

once had nothing but the tattered rags of our sins, are now clothed in the glorious garments of Christ's righteousness. We, who once sat on death row waiting for God's eternal damnation, now have heard our Savior declare us "not guilty!" The inheritance we once squandered and lost by our rebellion against God now has been restored by our Redeemer. What joy and jubilee is ours in Christ, our Promised One!

The same Christ expands on that joy, ***"The LORD has anointed me...to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair..."*** God's people respond, ***"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."***

Again the Messiah uses a picture of contrasts to expand our jubilee. He describes a major wardrobe change. At Isaiah's time, when a person was mourning or sorrowful, they would put on rough clothing called sackcloth and pour black ashes on their head to symbolize their mourning. That was our sad condition because of our sins, but look at the new wardrobe from Christ!

Funeral garb is replaced with wedding garments. We're like a bride and groom dressed for their wedding day—wearing their best. In a similar way, Jesus clothed us with garments of his salvation and righteousness. No more ashes for us. No more sorrow or mourning. Only the wardrobe of jubilation, unbounded delight and gladness. Because Jesus himself has dressed us for the occasion, our God now welcomes us into his glorious presence.

With that blessed truth in mind, we can't help but respond. At the end of our lesson Isaiah talks about how ***"the soil makes the sprout come up"*** and ***"a garden causes seeds to grow."*** Even if you aren't a gardener, you can understand this picture. Every spring we see exactly what Isaiah describes. Buds spring forth from tree branches. Tender blades of grass shoot out of the ground, and planted seeds break through the soil.

What's the point of this familiar picture? The prophet explains when he says, ***"In this way the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations."*** In spring we see plants ***"spring up"***. That's natural. What is just as natural, if not expected, is that those who have received the Savior's love also burst forth in righteousness and praise.

Think about what Isaiah says here. Is there anything more natural for the people of God than blooming in righteousness and praise, especially when we realize how completely our Savior has changed our lives? We, who were once poor beggars, now have all the treasure of heaven. We can't keep silent about that. The joy we know will naturally show itself in the praise that flows from our lips. We *have* to break forth in praise, just as the earth can't keep from blooming in the spring. Dressed in Christ's holiness, we also *want* to bloom in daily, God-pleasing living. So how can we best bloom as our Lord desires? How can we show more clearly this Advent season that we are ***"the planting of the LORD"***?

Why not do something that seems almost too obvious to mention? Why not be more intentional about doing things that glorify our God during this Advent season? Think of where the focus of so much of Christmas is in our society. In a sense, it's on the North Pole rather than on the manger of Bethlehem. We get swept along by the spirit of giving to one another, but easily lose sight of the Giver of every good and perfect gift, who above all gave his beloved Son. How can we keep the proper focus as we prepare to celebrate Christmas? Why not set aside a time each day to read and reflect on the Messiah's coming and what that means for you? Why not also make that time into a time to worship that Messiah with prayer and song?

Maybe you and I could expand our "gifts-to-give" list this year. For example, one Christmas Eve, a family had opened all their presents, each person oohing and aahing over what he or she had received. All excitedly showed one another what they got when the five-year-old son happened to see the manger scene under the Christmas tree. He looked at the crèche for a few seconds, scanned all the presents and wrapping paper scattered around the room and then asked, "Whose birthday is it anyway?" The boy then announced he wanted to give something back to Baby Jesus.

Might we want to follow suit? Could we include the Lord on our "gifts-to-give" list? Isn't that a fitting way to glorify our God this season? Our Source of joy has turned our lives into an unending Year of Jubilee. How fitting, then, that as we reflect on how dramatically Jesus has changed our lives, we can bring him special offerings of praise and thanks.

At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned that this text should really have trumpets sounding to introduce it. Maybe that isn't necessary. After all, shouldn't you and I provide the jubilation? The trumpet of joy is sounding in our hearts as we reflect on the change Jesus has made in our lives, and as we respond to the Lord with the praise of our lips, the righteousness of our lives, and the gifts of our gratitude. May our Savior's love fill you anew this Advent season, as you daily celebrate the jubilee of God's Anointed! Amen.