

Our Mission:

To share Christ with the world
and grow disciples for Jesus



Loving God and Loving Neighbor as Ourselves

Background:

Isaiah 61 is considered to have been written as Israel is being liberated from their captivity in Babylon. The prophet holds out the image of restoration after long years in exile. And yet, this is not simply a return to the ways of the past, for God is making a covenantal promise that this remnant will be a witness to all nations of the righteousness of God. This kingdom will exist for the sake of others as heralds of the good news of God's righteousness and justice.

Theology Connection:

Jesus proclaims this passage to have fulfilled in him before the congregation in Nazareth. Might we understand why the people did appreciate Jesus' take on this text? They understood this text to celebrate their liberation from foreign oppressors and not the expansion of the kingdom to include such foreigners. We too would like belief in Jesus to secure us a reward, rather than serving as a call to attend to the brokenhearted and weary. This text makes a promise of salvation but also makes a challenge; 'What have we been saved for?'

Application:

It is a couple of weeks until Christmas. In baptism we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit. While there are many activities that intrude upon our schedule, might this text cause us to rethink our schedule? Are we too busy to minister to the poor? How might we care for the brokenhearted? Do we know people who are held captive by their distress over the holidays? Might we help them find release? Can we plan to give to someone in need without intent of receiving?

The Text: Isaiah 61: 1-11

61 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, ³and 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.

⁴They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated;

they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

⁵Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.

⁶And 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.

⁷Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so, you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours.

⁸"For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed."

¹⁰I 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 his righteousness as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

ADULT

The text talks about being blessed. What does it mean to you to be blessed? How are God's blessings manifested in your life?

We too often associate God's blessings with that which we hold in our hands, but Scripture points to blessings as that which we hold in our hearts. How might your heart be nurtured this season? Are there meaningful ways you can attend to the heart of others?

YOUTH

Please read Isaiah 61:1-11

Why do you come to church every Sunday? Why do you sing the songs, or choose not to sing? Why do you put money in the offering plate, or choose not to? Why do you take the elements of communion? What are you doing here?

God so loved the world. God's desire is to restore and heal brokenness for all people, including the family in line at the Food Bank, the teen afraid to go to school because of bullies, the trans-gender adult facing rejection. The gospel is about more than saving souls to get people to heaven. It's about bringing God's love and healing to a broken world. It's also about justice and mercy.

So, knowing this about God I can answer this question... why am I here... I'm here to help us look together a God's longing for a world as it could be. I'm here to help us understand God's intention for our lives and for our world. We gather in worship to honor God. We honor God by helping the poor and brokenhearted and by standing up against injustice and for having mercy.

Ask yourself these questions: What is going on in our community or in the world that makes you want to say, "Enough already. It's not right." How does that align with God's desire for justice and right living? How can your time in worship encourage and inspire a life of just action?

Dear God,

Thank you for leading us by example. Please help us live out your example and give us strength to stand for what's right in the world. In Jesus name we pray, amen!

CHILDREN'S

God gives us some amazing abilities! The most important ability that He gives us is the power to share His love with others. We read in our passage today that our work is to bring healing and freedom to people. We can do this by helping people understand just how much Jesus loves them! So, as Christians, one of our big important jobs is to help people know that they are loved. We do this through how we treat them with our words and with our actions.

Think:

1. How do you show others that you love them?
2. What is something that you can do this week to show God's love to others?

Try it:

To show how much you love and appreciate your family, do something nice for them this week! You can write them a nice letter or card, you can draw a picture, or simply say, "I love you!"

Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for loving us so much! Please help us to be more like You in everything that we say and do. Please keep us all safe, happy, and healthy. We pray this in Your holy name, Amen!