

December 18, 2019

Advent III

Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church

Isaiah Sees the Savior: The Savior's Work

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It used to be that children would often end up in jobs very similar to their parents. The son of a farmer became a farmer. The child of a teacher became a teacher and so on. You could predict the future career of a child with some degree of accuracy. But this does not hold up so well anymore. But maybe we can get a good idea of what someone will do in life by watching what they do as a child. I enjoyed taking things apart, building with Legos and making model airplanes. So I became a pastor. Maybe this method of predicting a child's future job doesn't work very well either.

Through inspiration by the Holy Spirit, the prophet Isaiah gets it right when looking ahead to Christ. Isaiah sees the Savior's birth and the Savior's names. Tonight we look through the eyes of Isaiah to see the Savior's work. The Savior's work brings us comfort and gives us work to do.

Isaiah 61:1–3 (NIV84)

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, 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 gladness 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.

How do we know that Isaiah sees the Savior in these verses and is not just writing about what Isaiah himself will do? Jesus makes it clear. When Jesus goes to his hometown of Nazareth and preaches in the synagogue, he used Isaiah 61 as his text. And the message was simple. Jesus told the people that he was the fulfillment of these words from Isaiah. Isaiah saw the work of the Savior.

Before we marvel at the work of our Savior, we first of all see that his work was given to him. He was anointed for this work. In the Old Testament, anointing was a way to set someone apart for a special job. They would literally pour olive oil on the person's head to anoint them. High priests were anointed to set them apart to serve in the temple. Kings were anointed to set them apart as rulers and shepherds of their people. The word for anoint is *mashach*. The one who is anointed is the *Mashiach* or Messiah. The anointed one in the Greek of the New Testament is Christ. Jesus is called the Messiah or the Christ because he was anointed by God for special work. Isaiah saw this through his prophecy 700 years before it happened. Jesus' work as the Messiah was set before him 700 years before the Son of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

This work is work only Jesus could accomplish fully. Think of how many broken hearted people there are in this world. An adult abuses a child and that child's heart is broken. A child rebels against his parents and the parents' hearts break. A husband or wife is unfaithful to their marriage vows and hearts are broken. A loved one is taken from this earth by accident or illness and hearts break. War and violence and disaster strike throughout the world and millions of broken hearts wonder if there is any hope. What can you or I do about it? Can we bind up all these broken hearts? Without Christ we can't even bind up our own broken hearts, much less help anyone.

And what about the prisoners in the darkness? It is bad enough to be a prisoner. But to be a prisoner in darkness would leave one without hope. So it is to be a prisoner of sin. Without Christ there is no escape from the punishment for sin, eternal death. The picture Isaiah gives us of life without Christ is a grim one – broken hearted, prisoners in darkness, ashes, mourning and despair. And there is nothing we could do to truly change this situation.

But Isaiah sees the Savior's work. This had to give him hope and give those who first heard this prophecy hope. The Savior was going to turn everything around. The birth of Christ began the year of the Lord's favor for all people.

God told his Old Testament people to observe a special Jubilee year every 50 years. On this special year, everything would be set back to the way it was before. Land that had been sold during the 50 years was returned to the original owner. Slaves were set free. Christ's work was to declare this year of the Lord's favor for all the world. By our sins we had sold ourselves into slavery. But Christ has purchased us by his own blood to restore us to be children of God. We had sold off our spiritual inheritance in pursuit of worldly gain. But out of his great mercy, God has justified us through Christ and made us heirs of eternal life. We are restored to God through Christ who has completed his work.

This is what he gives us to wear now that he has restored us to God: *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.*

Of course, these are not physical items to put on but are a spiritual attitude that accompanies faith in Christ. Though we have been prisoners of sin, and have broken hearts because of our sin and sins against us and had no hope of escape, we are no longer in despair. For Christ has been born for us and accomplished his work. Therefore we do not have to go about our lives in mourning, but can rejoice and be glad.

In just under a week the Sunday school children are going to give us a visual example of this verse. When they get dressed for the Christmas Eve program they are going to put on a garment of praise, the beautiful Christmas dress for the girls, maybe a new shirt for the boys. And they will look very nice. I don't know if any will put on a crown of beauty but there might be a bow or two added to nicely combed and styled hair. And while they might not put on the oil of gladness which would be perfume, I'm sure they will have been bathed or showered before putting on the festive clothes. Why get cleaned up, dressed up and brush your hair? Because they will be proclaiming the birth and the work of our Savior on Christmas Eve. Christ gives us great joy and we match our clothes to our attitude of joy.

So we do after Christmas too. We match our lives to the joy and peace of Christ's forgiveness. Our personalities will of course show this joy and peace in different ways. Some believers are bubbly and outgoing. Others are quiet and introverted. But those who know you will know that Christ has changed you. For we have received the good news that Christ has released us from sin and given us the sure hope of eternal life. And though the world may try to plunge us into despair again and the devil may try to put us back into the darkness of sin, nothing can undo the work of Christ. Therefore we stand firm in him forever.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

This reminds me of the sequoia trees in California. Those trees display the splendor of the Creator. They make regular trees seem small. And the sequoia trees outlast many other trees. They have survived fires and are resistance to pests. Believers, you are like these giant trees. Not that we are so impressive to look at that people will travel hundreds or thousands of miles to see us, but believers stand out in this world. For this world is filled with broken hearts, mourning and despair. But you have hope in the midst of this. Even when terrible things happen around you or to you, you have hope in Christ. For Christ completed the work he was anointed for. He gives us hope beyond this life. And people will notice the hope you

have in Christ. Through faith, the Lord has made you a display of his splendor.

Not all of Isaiah's prophecy was good news for the people. Some of it told of a future in captivity for the people. Terrible events happened during Isaiah's life too. But God gave Isaiah a view of the Savior to give him and his people hope to endure every situation and hope for the future. We rejoice at Christmas because everything Isaiah saw about the Savior is true. He is Emmanuel, God with us. He is our Prince of Peace. And he has completed the work he was anointed to do. We are free from sin because of the Christ Child born for us.

We sing together verse 1 of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"

*God rest ye merry, gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember, Christ, our Savior
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy*

Amen.