

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Third Sunday after Epiphany, February 3, 2019
Isaiah 61:1-6**

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—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.

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

Jesus returns to his hometown in our gospel lesson. Reports have been filtering in about Jesus' life outside of Nazareth. The people have heard Jesus has power to do miracles. What will he do when he comes home? They invite him to the synagogue and are eager to hear him speak. What scripture does he open to? He opens to the words of our lesson from Isaiah and informs the people these words are speaking about him and the year of the Lord's favor he is bringing.

Jesus opens and starts reading, **"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."**

"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." Jesus uses these words to inform us about the year of the Lord's favor. What does he reveal to us about the year of the Lord's favor? He reveals the Lord will dress our hearts for praise during the year of the Lord's favor.

Isaiah opens our lesson with the words of the servant of the Lord. This servant has appeared several different times throughout Isaiah (most notably in Isaiah 53). What is the servant's message? The servant of the Lord says the Lord has given him some specific tasks. **"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-- 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."

People often get confused about what Jesus means with these words. What exactly is the good news he came to proclaim to the poor? How would he bind up the brokenhearted? Who would he set free? Allow me to share a story with you about a man the message which the servant of the Lord would help. The man's name is Ray. Ray grew up in a Christian home. He and his family faithfully attended church. He went to Sunday School, Christian day school and high school.

After school, Ray decided to enlist. He ended up joining the Marines. The war in Iraq broke out and he was shipped over to the Middle East. He was there for three tours of duty and the third tour is when things fell apart for him. Ray and his squad were out on patrol when they ran into IEDs on the side of the road. The truck in front of him was blown to bits and the explosion killed one of his best friends and the event horribly shook him up.

One day, Ray and his squad got in a firefight with some insurgents. They were able to fight them off, but they still had to clear the houses in the area. Ray found an insurgent in one of the houses. They stopped and stared at each other when Ray heard an IED explode outside. The noise took him back to his friend's

death and without giving it a second thought he pulled the trigger even though the insurgent had thrown his gun down and had his hands up in the air.

Ray wasn't thrown in jail, but he knew he was a murderer. Jesus didn't want him to be a murderer. How could Jesus still love him? Ray's guilt held him prisoner. It broke his heart and his spirit. He started thinking of killing himself. Finally, he brought his guilt to a fellow soldier who was a Christian. What could his fellow Christian say to Ray to release him from his guilt? **"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." His fellow soldier pointed him to Christ who fulfilled these words. Jesus came to release people who are held captive by their sins. He came to take their hearts which have been broken by sin and to make them whole. He came to proclaim to those who are poor in spirit that they have the riches of heaven.

We all have sins which hold us prisoner like Ray. It might be an abortion you had or the fact you didn't try to stop someone you know from getting one. You may have raised your hand and struck someone who was defenseless. It could be a divorce which holds you prisoner. Maybe someone blames you and says you are the reason they don't come to church anymore. The list is long and extensive of sins which hold your heart and mine captive and beats them up over and over.

Our Old Testament lesson proclaims to us Jesus came to remove sin's guilt. He came to set you free from your sins. This is why Jesus opened to this section of Isaiah and said it was being fulfilled. It was fulfilled because he is the savior who came to bind up the brokenhearted and set free those held prisoner by their sins. Jesus is here to tell you that you are forgiven from the sins which have held you captive for so long. Rejoice in his forgiveness.

How can you express the joy Jesus' forgiveness gives you? **"They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 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."**

The way to express your joy for the year of the Lord's favor is by sharing the Lord's favor with others who are held captive by their sins. You know people who have are held captive by their past sins. You know people who are broken hearted by their own sins or the sins of others. You know people whose lives sin has destroyed and made them look like devastated cities. You know people who have been devastated by sin and its horrible consequences. What can you do for them?

"And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God." Isaiah says you are the Lord's priests and his ministers. What does this title enable you to do? It enables you to do what Ray's fellow soldier did for him. It means you can proclaim the year of the Lord's favor to those who are struggling with guilt and sin. You have the privilege and joy to proclaim to them that they don't need to be held prisoner by their sins any longer.

What if you don't feel worthy to proclaim this message? What if you don't think you have the right words to say? What if you think only a pastor should proclaim this message? I want you to take Isaiah's message and Jesus' fulfillment of the message to heart. Jesus is the savior. He is the one who won forgiveness of sins. He is the one who sets prisoners free. He is the one who binds up the brokenhearted. He is the one who you and I point others to.

You aren't the savior and neither am I. We can only point others to Christ who is their savior because we know he is our savior. The reason you and I share Jesus with those who are held captive by sin is because we know what it is like to be held captive by sin. It is a struggle anyone who calls themselves must be willing to face every day and take on every day because we sin every day. The devil can rightly remind us of the horrible and terrible fact we sin every day.

However, you and I aren't the savior. Jesus is our savior and what has he proclaimed about himself? **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."**

"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." He says he has set sinners free and he wants those who have been set free to set others free with his message of forgiveness. I pray the Lord blesses our efforts to share the year of his favor with others. Amen.