

**Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11**

Advent 3B Midweek + December 20, 2017  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Jubilee

The Word of the Lord from Isaiah 61:1,2: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...." This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

The Christ is coming! That's the triumphant proclamation of Isaiah. The people dwelling in darkness will see a great light. The virgin will conceive and bear a Son. He will bring comfort, grace upon grace, for His people. Our Old Testament lesson for this week continues the Good News that the Messiah is anointed to bring Good News. He will bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives and open the prison to those who are bound. He will proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, as well as His day of vengeance. He will comfort all those who mourn. All that has been ruined and devastated will be rebuilt, repaired, raised up.

There's enough in this text to keep us occupied for a long time, so we'd best zero in on something, so here's something: the Messiah comes to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. When Isaiah's first hearers heard of the year of the LORD's favor, they knew it wasn't some arbitrary, random twelve months where things went better than normal. The year of the LORD's favor was the Year of Jubilee.

The Lord commanded Jubilee back in Leviticus 25. It was to happen every fiftieth year in the nation of Israel, and it had several components to it. It began with the Day of Atonement, when the sacrifice was made for the sins of the people so that the Lord forgave them. During the year of Jubilee that followed, the Israelites were commanded to plant no crops – they were to let the fields lie fallow. The Lord promised that He would provide for enough of a harvest beforehand that the people would have enough to eat. In fact, as the calendar worked out, the Israelites were to let the fields lie fallow during the year before that one, too; but there was no need for concern, because the Lord promised an abundant harvest during the 48<sup>th</sup> year to provide food for the next two. He would give daily bread; and as the people watched the fields *not* produce, they would remember that their food came from the provision of God, not the work of their hands.

Along with the command to let the fields lie fallow, the Lord also declared that slaves be set free. Sometimes, Israelites became slaves of other Israelites because of debts incurred or the like: they sold themselves, and sometimes their families, to pay off the debt. However, the Lord commanded that, in the Year of Jubilee, all Israelite slaves were to be released from slavery. All debts were to be forgiven. It didn't matter if they'd been slaves for 49 years or 49 hours: when the Jubilee came, they were free.

There was more: during Jubilee, the Lord commanded that the Israelites exercise extra care for the poor. They were to loan money without interest and sell food without profit. They were to be merciful: *they were to care for others without benefitting themselves*. After all, the Lord hadn't just brought the wealthy out of Egypt, but He had redeemed the poor, too. He valued them, so His people were to value them.

That was the Year of Jubilee, the "year of the Lord's favor." For a moment, put yourself in the shoes of an Old Testament Israelite who doesn't believe the promises of God. Such a man would view the Year of the Lord's Favor as an annoyance at best. Every fifty years, he's not allowed to plant crops; and since he doesn't believe that the Lord will provide, he worries that he's going to die. He has to

release slaves and forgive debts; and since he doesn't trust the Lord, this is a terrible blow as he needs to give up profits and workers. Likewise, helping the poor holds no upside for a year. For such a man, the Jubilee is a setback, a *punishment*. Now put yourself in the shoes of an Old Testament Israelite who does trust in the promises of God. The Year of Jubilee reminds him that God does provide; that God has released them from their slavery in Egypt; and that God helps the poor and doesn't keep a record of debt. For the believer in Old Testament Israel, the Year of Jubilee is all good news, perhaps even *despite* what he sees.

Now, I've heard extensive theories on the purpose of the Jubilee. Some have said that God commanded this because the fields needed a break from crops, so He mandated the rest. As far as the slaves and the debts and the poor, some have suggested that the Lord commanded this in order to provide a necessary reset to the economy of Israel every fifty years; in fact, I remember one sermon in which the preacher ran through American history, noted that we suffer an economic depression every fifty years (plus or minus ... 25 years), and then declare that we should establish a Year of Jubilee in America. (Me? I'd buy that new house with the big mortgage in year 49.) But the Year of Jubilee was not about resetting the economy: if there were such temporal benefits, then thanks be to God for the icing on the cake. The Year of Jubilee, however, was all about the Messiah who was coming.

Jesus has come. His death on the cross was your Day of Atonement: His was the Sacrifice for your sin so that God does not hold your sins against you, for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all your sins. For the sake of Jesus, God promises that He will provide you with daily bread, even when you don't see the field producing or the résumé getting a response. For the sake of Jesus, the Lord declares He has delivered you from the slavery of sin; rather than die a slave, you live forever in the household of God. For the sake of Jesus, the Lord declares He releases you from your debt of sin: there is no debt anymore, because Jesus has paid it all. For the sake of Jesus, the Lord promises help to you, the poor – not for profit, not to gain a hold over you for future use, but because He is merciful. Now, the Lord promises all of this to all people for the sake of Jesus; but those who have no faith don't believe it. They see the Gospel as an inconvenience, an annoyance or perhaps a punishment that robs them of what they would rather do or be instead. Tragically, those who reject Christ – the Year of Jubilee made flesh – will instead suffer the Day of the Lord's vengeance when He returns in glory to judge.

For you, though, this is only Good News. Jesus is your Jubilee: not just for one year out of fifty, but for eternity. For now, you will suffer poverty of one sort or another. You will suffer broken hearts and captivities. You will suffer at the hands of others, and you will mourn. That is the reality of life in a sinful world; but it is not the end of the story. The Day is coming when the Jubilee will be revealed in glory, when you are delivered to eternal life.

In the meantime, the Jubilee is yours already, just unseen; for Jesus is yours already because He has made you to be His. The start of our Old Testament lesson gives a brief, shadowy hint of how this is so: "The *Spirit of the Lord GOD* is upon *Me*," it begins. Spirit, Lord, Me – "Me" being the Messiah. This text begins with reference to the Holy Trinity. It is in the name of this Trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that you have been baptized, added to the Church, to the people of God. How do you know that Jesus is your Jubilee? Because He chose you. He said "I baptize you." At your Baptism, Jesus declared that the Lord favors you. It's only a matter of time until the Jubilee is revealed in all His glory to your eyes.

Until then, courage, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Even as you wait for deliverance, the Lord is keeping His promises. He provides all that is needed. This very night, He speaks to you His Word and He feeds you with His Feast of the Jubilee. By these means, He says to you again, "I have released you from your slavery, I have paid off your debts, and I will provide all that you need now and forever. You are Mine, because you are forgiven for all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen