

BIBLE STUDY
December 7, 2020

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 61: 1-2A, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

John 1: 6-8, 19-28

1. Isaiah 61: 1-2A, 10-11

- This passage comes from the Third Isaiah (Chapters 56-66). These chapters were written after the exile when the people had returned home. They continue the spirituality and teaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem and the Second Isaiah.
- In the Second Isaiah, there are four Servant Songs (42: 1-4; 49: 1-7; 50: 4-11; 52:13—53:12). These songs identify a mysterious servant who will have the mission of saving Israel by redemptive suffering and will become a light to all nations. Christians have seen an image of Christ in this Servant. The passage for Sunday, although it is not one of these songs, is very similar to them in style and thought.
- **Vv. 1-2:** The Prophet says that he has received the anointing of the Spirit in order to bring Good News to the afflicted, the brokenhearted, and the prisoners.
- Anointed is the same word as Messiah and Christ. Jesus Christ means that Jesus is the Anointed One. Jesus used this passage in Luke as his inaugural address in the synagogue of Nazareth. He saw his mission as fulfilling the words of Isaiah. He was sent to bring Good News to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and release to prisoners.
- A year of favor: there was the tradition of the Jubilee year. As every seventh day was a Sabbath Day, every seventh year was a sabbatical year when no crops were planted so as to let the land rest. Every 50th year was to be a Jubilee year when debts were forgiven, sold land was returned to the owner, indentured slaves received freedom. It was a restart time, a new beginning. The Anointed One would proclaim a time of freedom.
- **Vv 10-11:** The new life through the deliverance of God is described in terms of a wedding. The redeemed are resplendent as a bride and groom on their wedding day. It is also described as beautiful as the harvest with all its produce.

2. John 1: 6-8, 19-28

- **Vv. 6-8:** John is the first ray of the light of God into the darkness of the world. Even though he was purely human, he was sent from God. He was not the Light but a witness to the Light. Jesus was the True Light and John came to prepare people for the arrival of the Light. Although John was only sent to Israel, Jesus, the True Light, would come for everyone.

- John would point out the True Light in an unexpected place, the human flesh of Jesus. The burning question throughout John's Gospel is can we believe that this Jesus, who appears to be human, who is in the flesh, is the Son of God.
- In John's Gospel, from the very beginning Jesus is on trial—who is he? Is he the Son of God? John is a witness in that trial of who Jesus really was.
- **Vv. 19-28:** This is the first interrogation of who Jesus is and John serves as a witness and gives testimony. The interrogation comes from the Jews in Jerusalem who will later bring Jesus to death. The interrogation comes in two parts. First, the priests and Levites ask him if he is one of the three messianic figures that were expected. John clearly tells them that he is not the Messiah. If not the Messiah, is he Elijah, the prophet who was expected to return before the arrival of the Messiah? (Malachi 3: 23 "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.") He is not. Is he the Prophet that was promised to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18 ("I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people.")
- John identifies himself with the voice crying out in the desert to prepare the way of the Lord in Isaiah 40. He thereby identifies himself with the tradition of seeing Isaiah 40-55 as a prophecy of a Messiah who would set the people free from sin and death. So, he is not the Messiah but is the precursor or the forerunner of the Messiah.
- The second part of the interrogation is from the Pharisees. If John is not one of the three Messianic figures, why does he baptize? In John's time, Jews baptized with water as a sign of seeking forgiveness for sins. The external washing pointed to the desire for an interior cleansing from sin. This was how John prepared the way of the Lord.
- John gave testimony that there was one among them whom they do not recognize---the whole point of the Gospel to recognize who Jesus really is: the Son of the Father. The one they do not recognize is greater than John and John is not worthy to unstrap the strap of his sandal.
- This happens in Bethany which is across the Jordan. Later in the Gospel, this area is identified as being safe for Jesus. Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived in Bethany. The Jewish leaders "intrusion" into Bethany signals the conflict and death that awaits Jesus.

3. 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

- Paul offers a series of short, to the point, exhortations. Each one is worth reflection.
 - Rejoice always. (This Gaudete=Rejoice Sunday. Rejoice because the Lord is near)
 - Pray without ceasing.
 - In all circumstances give thanks.
 - Why? It is the will of God for you In Christ Jesus.
 - Do not quench the Spirit. (Listen to and obey the promptings of the Spirit)

- Test everything. Paul's encouragement to follow the Spirit sometimes led to excesses in the community. They had to test (or discern) what came from God and what was not from God.
 - Retain what is good. The product of discernment.
 - Refrain from every kind of evil
- **Vv. 23-24: A Concluding Blessing:** Be blessed by the God of peace. May God make you holy. May his blessing and sanctification encompass every part of your being: spirit, soul, and body.
- **The one who calls you is faithful:** God's word is dependable.
- **He will accomplish it:** If he said it, he will do it.