

Sermon on **Isaiah 61:1-6** for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – 1.23.22  
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN, - Pastor N. Scharf

Are you an adventure starter or an adventure go-alonger? Are you the one who has an idea, plans it out and gathers people to go along? Or are you the one always going-along? You know which one you are. I am almost always a go-alonger whether it is siblings or friends or groups I'm a part of, I may have ideas, but I'm not the planner, set-er-up-er. I'm the go-alonger. I have people in my life who like to hike -siblings, in-laws, and friends. I am often brought along. I have climbed mountains. And I have learned to bring more water than I think I need, snacks, layers of clothing for the different altitudes, and a bottle of IB profen. I've learned that when you go up the mountain and think you are at the top, you realize that the summit is only a foothill to the actual mountain. From the ground it looked like the top, but there was yet a more amazing summit and one more difficult (hours) to get to the top of, but the view is worth it.

Isaiah's prophecies have proven to be much like this mountain phenomenon – a mountain top as the prophecy is fulfilled in part, but then a more amazing summit or fulfillment awaits. Isaiah prophesied the good news of the return from the Babylonian Captivity. Under the foreign ruler Cyrus the Great the Jews had permission and supplies to come back to the promised land, rebuild the temple and rebuild the walls. This prophecy was fulfilled in part, but a far greater fulfillment awaited.

Jesus stood in the synagogue he grew up in among many who knew him and his family. He unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, found these very words, read them, and said, "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (Luke 4:20). After he finished speaking, they all said such nice things about him, but it was clear to Jesus, they didn't believe him that he was the fulfillment of this prophecy, and he called them out on it. The mood spoiled in an instant and they drove him out of town to throw him off the cliff, "*but he walked through the crowd and went on his way.*" Those people forfeited the great gift and comfort Jesus would win for them and had clearly proclaimed to them. As we go through these verses today, rejoice that you see the true summit, and that you too are the fulfillment of these words – no IB profen needed.

**Jesus proclaims Freedom for the Captives.**

- 1. The LORD anointed him by His Spirit to do it and to say it.**
- 2. The LORD brought us by His Spirit to believe it and proclaim it.**

I have found as I've grown older that the most wonderful time of the year (Christmas) is followed by a very difficult time of year, at least for me. The wonderment of the first snowfalls is followed by the unique mix of icy roads and either sunny and -15 degrees, or less cold and completely overcast. No one writes songs about this time. There are even relatively few songs about the season of the church year we celebrate – Epiphany. It's also a busy time, a hard time for many, especially those who grieve. Not to mention the things we put aside to worry about later, usually find a way of catching up with us. These words of our LORD couldn't come at a better time. Our Epiphany readings focus us on God's solution.

*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, 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 joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.* I don't know if you think me dramatic, but these words are so good to hear. Often we are bowed low with whatever trials and burdens we bear. Often we have broken hearts over some betrayal, or some reality that strikes home and we just weren't ready for, broken-hearted over our sin and sinfulness for the things we've done and the consequences we face here and now, and will they follow us to eternity? Often we feel trapped in situations, in ruts, in uncertainty, and we grieve, we mourn, even despair of ourselves, of life, of hope. What messes we are sometimes, or much of the time. But Jesus stood up in the synagogue to say that God foretold through the prophet Isaiah a fix for all of this, for all of us, Him.

And Jesus proved himself by his teaching – words with authority, law which condemned our sin and sinfulness, our sinful arrogance and pride, our lust, our greed, our anger, our faithlessness, and gospel – the good news that sinners like us, with all our failures and faults are washed clean in his blood and forgiven, freed, love that knows no bounds. Jesus proved himself by his actions – miracles, signs pointing people to listen to his Words, to trust them, to put them into practice, to cling to them. Jesus proved that he was the fulfillment by taking the mountain of our sins and sinfulness upon him and suffering the hell we deserved and had merited, God’s wrath was directed at him. He took it all. He died. And three days later he rose again.

And those bowed down in sin and shame straighten up at the sound of his voice, of his proclamation of forgiveness. Those who were broken hearted feel whole when they look to him and listen to his promises. Those who were trapped and captive feel the shackles fall from their wrists and hearts. Those kept captive for so long they couldn’t see now breath free air, open their eyes to see what God has done, and the Savior who proclaims it to us. Yes he is the fulfillment. He stands us on the ultimate summit so we see. The pain was upon him, and we enjoy the view, joyous, crowned with beauty, given reason to sing his praise and not despair. Jesus is our fix. Jesus is our Savior. **The LORD anointed him by His Spirit to do it and say it.**

**The LORD brought us by His Spirit to believe it and proclaim it.** *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. Strangers 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.* In his mercy, Jesus didn’t just do this for the Jewish people, but for all nations. One of the main focuses of this time of the church year is that the Gospel message is for all, it’s for me. Through Jesus’ work for us and the proclamation of this good news to us, the Spirit has worked faith in our hearts to believe it, to grow in it, to be strengthened by it, to find certainty in Him. The oak tree or terebinth was a strong, sturdy tree that brought shade and could be seen from all around. God calls you, his church, his people, these oaks, *“a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”*

While the Jews who returned, rebuilt the temple and the wall and many of the houses, the temple, the wall, and many of the houses would again be destroyed and burned shortly after Jesus’ lifetime, but what Jesus has done for us and through us, the church, lasts unto eternity. The *“strangers”* and *“foreigners”* mentioned are you. Jew and Gentile of all different backgrounds alike are brought into this family of believers through Christ Jesus and him alone. Plenty of Jews and Gentiles have rejected him, but some, you, have not. By God’s grace you know the truth of Jesus’ words and you see him for who he is the Savior of the world, and one worth proclaiming.

*“Shepherds, Foreigners, Priests, Ministers of our God, You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.”* God has brought us into his family and he uses us, our gifts, our abilities, our hearts, our voices, our actions to share this message of Freedom and Forgiveness in Christ Jesus, the Word of God, powerful and effective. We are all part of this family. We are all part of this work. And so, get to work. Rejoice in what Jesus has done for you. See the peace, freedom, and forgiveness you possess in Him. And live for him. Proclaim this message with the words you speak at work, at school, among friends, with the love and concern you show, with your deeds and your gifts for others for the work we do together in sharing the Gospel. Grow in this knowledge by studying His Word. Oak Trees, Terebinths, the Holy Spirit uses his Word and Sacrament to shoot your roots deep to withstand the storms of this life, and the ice and cold too, and to bear green leaves and fruit as a blessing for others.

You, too, are the fulfillment of this prophecy, the New Testament Church. And though often struggling, often weighed down, often harried and harassed, we have the certainty that we are free and forgiven in Christ Jesus. **The LORD anointed Him by His Spirit to do it and say it.** And though often weak, sinner-saints this side of eternity, **the LORD brought us by His Spirit to believe it and proclaim it.** You are *oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.* A beautiful sight, from the ultimate summit of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.