

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11 The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to preach good news to the afflicted.  
He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release for those who are bound,  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance for our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
<sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion,  
to give them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy instead of mourning,  
a cloak of praise instead of a faint spirit,  
so that they will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD to display his beauty.  
<sup>10</sup>I will rejoice greatly in the LORD.  
My soul will celebrate because of my God,  
for he has clothed me in garments of salvation.  
With a robe of righteousness he covered me,  
like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest,  
and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry.  
<sup>11</sup>For as the earth produces its growth,  
and as a garden causes what has been sown to sprout up,  
so God the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up  
in the presence of all the nations.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Back in Old Testament Israel they had what was called the Year of Jubilee. Basically what it was was that every fifty years slaves, or more accurately, indentured servants, would be released from their service. Also, any lands that had been sold in the last 50 years would be returned to their original owner. It was a “great reset” to the way things were, a reminder that things don’t last, things will go back to how they were, once upon a time. Of course the picture was that one day the Savior would come and make all things right again, the way things were at the beginning.

We could really use one of those, couldn’t we? A year of Jubilee, a reset to the way things used to be, even just a year ago as 2019 was coming to a close.

Well, God’s Word before us this morning through the prophet Isaiah proclaims that what we wish for — a great reset, for everything to be as it

was at the beginning, perfect and free of the effects of sin — is coming. For Jesus our Savior is the fulfillment of these words. Recall that on one occasion Jesus went to the synagogue and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him and he read these very words, because he is the fulfillment of them. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is the one thing needed, the one thing that binds up the broken hearted, gives freedom to captives, releases those who are bound in slavery.

Living in a sinful world, attaching ourselves to things of this world, that’s us — brokenhearted by the people and things we lose, captive to the fleeting time we have to enjoy them, and bound over by sin to death and decay.

It’s true, living in this world, we can’t help but become attached to the things in it. And there’s nothing intrinsically wrong with that. It’s just the way it is as human beings — we become emotionally attached to the things we love, the things we use, the things we desire. But our enemy knows this. So Satan works to get us to make the things of this world and the people of this world the be all, end all — the only things that matter or are needed.

Where do you go in times of distress and suffering? Where do you look to find your greatest joy and happiness? If your answer is anything but, first and foremost to God and to his Words and promises, you’re in for more heartbreak, and captivity, bound even more tightly to death and decay.

For as we heard last week, **the grass withers, the flowers fade**. The things of this life don’t last, and if we build our houses on them, if we build our hopes and dreams on them, one day they will collapse with a great crash. We’ll find that our faith was just an empty shell that loved the things we knew wouldn’t last. **But the Word of the Lord stands forever**. When we look to him for our highest good, when he is our fortress in difficult and impossible times, all our hopes and dreams, our futures, our life after this life, they are all still intact, still safe and secure.

Because Jesus came for people like us, people who attach themselves to the things of this world only to find heartbreak and loss. Jesus came for people like us who cling to the fleeting time we have left as if this is all there is. Jesus came for people like you and me, who bind ourselves to sinful thoughts, words, and actions, sinners who are under sin’s curse, bound to death and decay.

By his perfect life lived for us he gave us something to cling to that will never perish, never spoil, never fade — his righteousness that makes us perfect before God and fit for heaven already today. By his perfect life

and innocent death he's freed us from the demands of the law as a way for us to get to heaven and provided a way through every heartbreak and loss since eternal life in heaven is ours and eternal death in hell is not. He's bound us to himself making what the law demands the way for us to show God our thanks, a new way of life rooted in joy.

That's today's candle, that's today's focus. Joy. The pink candle. I don't know why it's pink, it just is. It represents joy, that's what you need to know. You also need to know what this joy, this biblical, spiritual joy, is. When we think of joy we probably think, "WAAAAA I'm so happy! I've got that Joy joy joy joy down in my heart!!" But that's not the kind of joy I want you think about right now. Because that kind of joy isn't something we always have. I might even say we rarely have it.

Here's the joy we have, and I've described it this way before. I don't remember where I heard it from but I think it is an excellent way to think about it. Joy is like a submarine. A submarine way deep down in the ocean. Nothing disturbs it, nothing affects it. Choppy water on the surface? It's fine. 20 foot waves, a rolling sea? still nothing. A hurricane could be raging and still the submarine deep down in the ocean is unaffected. I read that even a tsunami could pass overhead and still it's perfectly calm, settled, stable and undisturbed.

That's the joy we have in Christ. Though it isn't alway seen, it's constant and unfazed. When sin's storm is raging again and again we come up swamped, when satan throws our sins in our face and says, "See, you're still my slave, my captive, my prisoner," here is your joy. Christ is our Savior. Christ lived, died and rose again for you. Christ has freed you from sin, death, hell, and the devil. While here I remain a sinner and will be till I die, there my future is sin-less. While here I remain under sin's curse of death, there I am free and will live for eternity.

In the middle of heartbreak, pain, suffering, when the things of this world go the way we know they will, they won't last, here is our joy, here is why we can be glad and not ever despair: God gave up his one and only Son to secure for you gifts and blessings innumerable and invaluable: He's forgiven our countless sin. He's made us righteous in his sight again. He's secured a home for each of us where heartbreak, pain, and suffering are so foreign they are unknown and never experienced.

Cling to God's promises, cling to this joy. when we attach ourselves to these things as God says we should — seek first his kingdom and his righteousness — not only are we doing what God says and have a clear conscience, but we're also loving things that can never be taken away!

These words before us this morning are first and foremost fulfilled in Jesus, but with a message like this that gives us such joy, in a way they are fulfilled in us too. For each of us, as God's children through baptism, has been anointed to proclaim Christ to the world.

That's one of the ways we prepare for Jesus' coming at Christmas. We proclaim the message. We're sinful. This world is sinful. We suffer. We deserve God's punishment. But God sent his Son to save us from both his punishment and this world. With a message like that there's a great opportunity for us to fulfill these words of Isaiah when he says:

**<sup>10</sup>I will rejoice greatly in the LORD.**

**My soul will celebrate because of my God,  
for he has clothed me in garments of salvation.**

**With a robe of righteousness he covered me,  
like a bridegroom who wears a beautiful headdress like a priest,  
and like a bride who adorns herself with her jewelry.**

**<sup>11</sup>For as the earth produces its growth,  
and as a garden causes what has been sown to sprout up,  
so God the LORD will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up  
in the presence of all the nations.**

We celebrate and proclaim God's grace in a number of different ways this time of year. Maybe you don't even think about it. Do you see all the Christmas lights up? The tradition began as a way to proclaim that Jesus is the light of the world, the light no darkness can overcome. Have you decorated your house? A tree? Have you eaten a candy cane? So many of the decorations we see are rooted in Christ and not only his birth, but his death for our sins too. And the presents, let's not forget about why we do that! It's a way to remember that Christmas is about the greatest gift God gave to us, his Son.

We listen to Christmas music — they don't all have to be about reindeer and snowmen. One of the blessings of technology is being able to hear a lot of really good Christ centered Christmas music that we've never had access to before.

And we prepare for Christ's coming by proclaiming with our actions. We go to church. We hear the word. We make it a priority, why wouldn't we with a message this good!

But it's also in how we live, not just at Christmas time but all year long. Our joy is like a submarine, but it doesn't need to be hidden like one. In fact it's hard to hide it, even in difficult times. You may not realize it, but

the hope you have, the confidence you exude, keeping your head up in difficult times, do not take them lightly. The world notices those things and it's just another way that we proclaim the grace, mercy, peace, and joy of our God.

Are you ready for Christmas? More important, are you ready for Jesus' return? With the joy of Christ in your heart, you're more ready than you think. With joy in your heart, proclaim his coming — what he's done, in all you do. Amen!