

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

DECEMBER 13, 2020

Isaiah 61.1-11 (1-4, 8-11)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;
the LORD has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
the LORD has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim release to the prisoners;
the LORD has sent me to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
the LORD has sent me to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God;
the LORD has sent me to comfort all who mourn;
the LORD has sent me to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations,
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.

While we are waiting, come; while we are waiting, come.

Jesus, our Lord, Emmanuel, while we are waiting come.

v 1, "While We Are Waiting, Come", (Hymn # 92. Glory To God Hymnal)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020

In prison...you visited me
Isaiah 61.1-11 (1-4, 8-11)

These words from Isaiah are also familiar because of Luke's use of it as the text for an sermon given by Jesus in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. John the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus, sensing that it is time for him to begin his witnessing, attends sabbath worship and as a known guest is offered the opportunity to share in worship. The attendant hands him the scroll that contains this text from Isaiah and Jesus not only reads it, he concludes his reading by commenting how the text had come true in himself, how he understood himself to be the one the anointed one of the Lord GOD. For us to understand Jesus in this way is natural, for his hometown colleagues, it would have been both equally challenging and comforting. The latter because, well, who does not want a hometown person to do well; challenging because, well, what gives Jesus the right to speak of himself that way? In the end the latter perspective carries the day because "they" drove Jesus out of town and to the edge of a hill in order to have a place to stone him. Luke says that "he passed through the midst of them and went on his way." (Luke 4.16-30)

Isaiah is clear about speaking for the LORD and saying how the Lord GOD (note how one term is capitalized in each case in the body of the text) loves justice, hating robbery and wrongdoing. Isaiah ends this poem with the affirmation: "For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. The LORD loves justice, and the people of Israel are to be the LORD's people when it comes to seeing that justice is done in the land, for this poem can be read as the Spirit of the Lord GOD anointing the entire people as well as an individual. The Christian tradition has Jesus as the anointed one but note how the covenant is made with "them" and "they" as well as "I" and "my".

And what is justice? The prophet illustrates by sharing how the people of GOD will receive: "a garland instead of ashes" (an expression of rejoicing rather than mourning); "the oil of gladness instead of mourning" (similar); and "the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." Further, the people will be as strong and steadfast as an oak tree, with strength and commitment to repair ancient ruins, former devastations, ruined cities. Justice means for the hopes and dreams of the people of Israel to be restored to and for and with all the people, including "the oppressed, the brokenhearted, the captives, and the prisoners." Isaiah's understanding from God was that there would be a time in which restoration would be the rule rather than ruin, hope instead of despair, praise instead of punishment, literally, the year of Jubilee which would restore all persons to their homes and relief from all their debts. The people would be visited by God for restoration.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT
DECEMBER 13, 2020

In prison...you visited me

Of these categories, prison is perhaps the easiest to understand metaphorically, for most of us have never found ourselves in a physical jail or prison because of unlawful behavior of any kind. We may have gone to jail to arrange for the release of someone, we may have posted bail for someone to be released, we may have even participated in a jail or a prison ministry of some kind and found ourselves walking into a jail or a prison at an appointed time to share our presence and our presents with those who were incarcerated.

Prison/Jail Locations

State of Michigan: 31 prison facilities: nearest to Midland: Saginaw and St. Louis
Federal Prison: one Milan; Bop.gov/locations/institutions/mil; visitation policies
Midland County Jail

Prison/Jail Visitation Guidelines

Visitation in a jail/prison can be depressing for the visitor, uplifting for the inmate

Visits help the visitor grow as a person, help the inmate feel less forgotten

An official ID will be required to enter: a driver's license or other authorized ID

Do not wear the colors of green or khaki to the visit, staff wears these colors

Do not wear clothing that is revealing, metal in clothing can trip detectors, inhibit visit

Having a change of clothing in your vehicle can help if you are denied initially

Jewelry of every kind is discouraged

Many civil rights of inmates have been taken away, the right to visitors has not been

Understand that going through metal detectors will be a necessity of the process

One's attitude can have an impact on whether the visit can be successful or not

Those who will encounter you within the jail/prison are working, respect their direction

You will be required to fill out an application for visitation to initiate the process

Limitations:

No mobile phone or any kind of recording device will be allowed inside the facility

No purses, bags, backpacks will be permitted

Visits will have a limited time frame, arriving early can maximize the time

Vehicles used to travel to the facility are subject to search by officials

Each facility will have visiting hours, weekdays are usually less busy than weekends

Each facility will have its own policy regarding who can be visited when

The staff on duty has ultimate call on whether you can visit or not

Prison/Jail visits: where there is a will, there is a way

In person: challenging because of Covid-19

Many institutions rotating to video visits of some kind

Do you know someone who is incarcerated, or someone who has a family member who is?

How can you support them?

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider when it comes to issues regarding incarceration?