

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas  
“Springing forth into the New Year with Jesus’ righteousness and praise”  
(Isaiah 61:10-11)  
December 31, 2023  
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas is from our Old Testament reading Isaiah 61:10-11.

**“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
My soul shall be joyful 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 ornaments,  
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
11 For as the earth brings forth its bud,  
As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,  
So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all  
the nations.”**

So far the text...

Do these words seem familiar to you? Yes, you maybe thinking. When did I hear them? It was just a couple of Sundays ago that these verses were read on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent. We also read them during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Midweek Advent service. So, we’ve heard them a few times. And that’s good.

Repetition helps us commit them to our memories. And these are great verses to remember always as we spring into the New Year and throughout the New Year of 2024 ...for they are full of comfort and joy. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent we read from Isaiah 40 that begins with the well-known verses:

**“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!” Says your God.  
“Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,  
That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned;**

**For she has received from the Lord's hand  
Double for all her sins."**

Comfort and joy, comfort and joy, oh tidings of comfort and joy" Isn't there a Christmas carol that sings these words? Yes, they've stuck in your memory haven't they ...as you've heard them sung over and over each Christmas. They are the lyrics to which the old English anonymous Christmas carol?

"God Rest You Merry Gentlemen" and of course we old English speak includes gentlewomen and gentle children... all people. For Christ was born to save all people – so says the first verse of this Christmas carol.

*"God rest you merry, gentlemen Let nothing you dismay  
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour Was born upon this day,  
To save us all from Satan's power When we were gone astray.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, For Jesus Christ, our Saviour  
was born on Christmas day.*

Are you feeling merry today on this last day of the year? Another year in the books? Time to celebrate and toast the New Year and watch the ball drop in New York?

God's word gives true merriment to our souls! It gives our souls true rest and peace from the accusations of all the sins that we committed in 2023 and all the rest of our years.

For another chapter and verse from Isaiah reminds us of this. No doubt this Christmas carol had this verse in mind when it was penned.

**Isaiah 53:6**

**All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."**

Our comfort and joy comes from this Good News alone – the baby born in Bethlehem has taken the iniquity of us all upon Him. And that is why Simeon did say by the Holy Spirit's power, the words from our Gospel reading from today... what we sing in the Nunc Dimittis in our liturgy.

**“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;  
30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation  
31 Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,**

The soul is at rest and can depart in peace when the Lord calls us to our heavenly home – be it 2024 or another year.

Yes God rest you merry gentle people! For God has prepared His salvation before the face of all peoples! Simeon beheld this salvation with his own eyes. Anna the prophetess did so also. Holding the baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon blessed God. He rejoiced at what God has done for him and all people. Comfort and joy. And he burst forth with tidings of comfort and joy!

We sing these words right after we receive the Lord’s Supper. For our souls are refreshed with the very forgiveness given to us through the eating and drinking of Jesus’ body and blood! Oh, what a great way to end the year and begin the New Year...with our souls at rest that the Lord has ended our spiritual warfare by His victory on the cross, that He pardoned our iniquity and from His hand we receive double pardon for all our sins!

And in our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 61, it begins with the very words of the Messiah prophesying what He will do! Yes, we heard the opening words of Isaiah 61 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent and Pastor Goetz, as you may remember, emphasized that these words are the words of the Messiah.

**““The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,  
Because the Lord has anointed Me  
To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,  
And the day of vengeance of our God;  
To comfort all who mourn,”**

**To console those who mourn in Zion,**

**To give them beauty for ashes,  
The oil of joy for mourning,  
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;  
That they may be called trees of righteousness,  
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”**

Tidings of comfort and joy! From whom? From the very lips of the Messiah as He read from the scroll of Isaiah in Luke 4 in the synagogue as was His custom.

**“20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

Jesus as true man was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure to be the Prophet, Priest and King. And here He speaks as prophet to us the greatest words that you can hear as you spring into the New Year!

Well, maybe you've lost a little spring in your step after one more year. Maybe you aren't a spring chicken anymore and I certainly count myself in that group. I had a little bet with my college roommate from Michigan yesterday. He's a big Lions fan. And whoever's team lost, because you may know, I'm a Cowboy fan, had to do as many pushups as the number that the team lost by. We were kidding each other that I'm an old man who isn't going to be able to do pushups anymore. We used to workout faithfully together in college in the basement of one of the dorms that was set up as gym. Well, fortunately for me, and this was the craziest ending of the game, I didn't have to do any pushups. My old roommate? Well, he had to do one. But, I did a few anyways just for old times sake.

Yes, we may not be as springy as we used to be in our bodies, but there's good news always for our souls. The God who makes the gardens spring forth and bud, makes our souls spring forth like newly planted trees!

**As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth,  
So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all  
the nations.”**

The Lord alone causes this. He makes our souls spring forth as trees of righteousness.

God has commissioned Jesus His Son “to bind up the broken in heart, the poor, lost, repentant sinners, to proclaim liberation to those who have been taken captive by sin and Satan, to tell those who are bound that they are to be free, that their prison-doors have been opened, to announce that a year, an endless period, of good pleasure and favor of Jehovah has come, a day in which He will avenge His own wrongs and those of His people upon His enemies.

For the purpose of His work is to bring comfort and joy to the mourners, to replace the ashes on their head with the turban and tiara of joy, like that worn by a happy bridegroom, to put on the oil of gladness and adornment after the period of deep mourning, when they were in the power of Satan. Where formerly the spirit of distress and uneasiness ruled, the garment of praise to Jehovah shall be donned. All this will result in making the believers trees of righteousness, characterized by the fruits of righteousness in them which are the result of faith.”

And then comes the change in speakers in Isaiah 61 in verses 10 and 11. This is the response of God’s people, His church springing with joyful delight!

**“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,  
My soul shall be joyful in my God;  
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,  
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,”**

This is the robe given to you in your baptism which you wear every day and into another New Year! It is compared to the beautiful robes worn by a bride and groom that are adorned with priceless jewels. For your salvation is priceless.

Yes, this is your soul’s response “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God”. Your God will take you into the New Year. Your God who loves you will guard and protect you in this New Year and keep your soul springing with joy.

And, once more, we have a change of speaker as we begin Isaiah 62 of our Old Testament reading. For Jesus speaks again about how He is relentless in bringing

His Good News of salvation to all people – yes to the Gentiles of whom Simeon spoke.

**“For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace,  
And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,  
Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
And her salvation as a lamp that burns.  
2 The Gentiles shall see your righteousness,  
And all kings your glory.”**

A light to the Gentiles of Jesus’ righteousness given to you through faith which you shine forth in the New Year for all unbelievers to see that they too may receive “comfort and joy” where there is heaviness and sadness. We begin the New Year praising God and rejoicing that God shines His light of love to all people through you and me as we share His prophetic word...and indeed proclaim the **“the acceptable year of the Lord”**, the favorable year of the Lord, endless years of God’s good favor springing anew through Jesus Christ -

**“Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:14)**

**“The peace of God, of which the angels sang, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”  
Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**