

We are the Anointed Ones
December 11, 2011 8:30 & 11:00a.m.
First Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dr. Donald W. Hackett
Text: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Lancaster, PA

Question to ponder: What do you expect from Jesus this Christmas?

The Text: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 New Revised Standard Version

(The Messenger Healer says) The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ²to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³to 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.

(The Ruler says) ⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

(The LORD says) ⁸For 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. ⁹Their 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.

(The Ruler says) ¹⁰I 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. ¹¹For 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.

Introduction

What kind of Messiah do you need this Christmas? I would love to be saved from all the traffic, crowded shopping, and hectic schedule. There are so many holiday events and parties crammed into one month. Why do we do this to ourselves every year? Maybe you would need a Messiah to pay your bills, cover your healthcare costs, or stock your refrigerator? Maybe you need a Messiah who will come alongside of you and carry your burdens and understand your pain? Perhaps you need a Savior to

rescue a relationship and heal wounds that go deep. What kind of Messiah do you need today?

Background

The book of Isaiah is a fascinating book. This book is located right in the center of the Bible and it is like a little Bible inside the Bible. It has 66 chapters. The Bible has 66 books. The Old Testament has 39 books. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah are about the judgment that is to come to Israel and Judah for wondering off and forgetting God. The New Testament has 27 chapters. The next 27 chapters of Isaiah are written at the end of his life and are all about the persistent love of God who seeks to win back a people in exile to his circle of love. Is that not a good description of the New Testament as well? Jesus is seeking, today and every day, to win every heart back to God. The Bible declares that Jesus is the source of all life and offers all a life of freedom to all.

The author Isaiah was a scribe living in Jerusalem and working in the royal courts of Judah from 740 B.C. to 681 B. C. For about 60 years he served five kings of Judah. The political situation at this time was stressful and spiritual climate was toxic. The brutal Assyrian army had captured and taken over the neighboring Israel and was threatening Judah. Some the kings for whom Isaiah served had turned to idols and murder. Can you imagine a scribe sitting there and taking his all in? Isaiah took notes, literally, of all the chaos and rebellion and his soul was distressed by the condition of his country and their disregard for what was holy.

Isaiah's Anointing

In chapter 6 Isaiah describes this shift from being a scribe to also becoming prophet. He has a wonderfully terrible vision of God in Heaven calling for someone to go and preach to the people what is to come. Isaiah responds, "*Here am I. Send me.*" I believe this shift is important for each of us to make. At some point in our lives you and I need to come to a point where we are not just doing our thing, but God's thing. **(This shift came for me in college where I said to God "Whatever you want me to do, I will do.")** It is normal in our culture to be busy with lots of good things...working jobs, paying bills, caring and feeding our families, hobbies, vacations, social events and holiday parties. Somewhere on our journey we need to decide to invite God to be our core passion. We say to God, "You know my life. It has been centered on me and taking care of my needs and those I love." This is good, but we need to move to the best. The best is to have God as the core driving force in your life and everything else lines up around that priority. This commitment moved Isaiah from the sidelines to the heart of what God was doing.

Our Anointing

As people who love and serve God, we work hard to meet our needs and those of the people we love. The difference is that we do it with God's power and priorities. We ask God what he would have us do. We move from the sidelines to the center of what God is doing. We listen for the voice of the Spirit to guide us into how to best invest our time and energy. Today we are commissioning two Stephen ministers. They have said to God, "Here am I. Send me." Rose Ellen Haggerty and Susan Allison are delightful and caring people. They work hard to serve their families and community. They have finished intense training to be equipped to love and serve in a deeper way. They cannot do this on their own. Like you and me they need to invite the power, grace, and wisdom of Jesus to fill them each day.

What the Messiah would do

Let us look at what is happening in Isaiah 61. Here Isaiah is fulfilling two functions of a prophet of forth-telling and fore-telling. The forth-telling comes as Isaiah speaks to his immediate pastoral situation by giving hope to those who had been dragged off into exile in the sixth century B.C. by saying: "*he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,*

to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives,

and release to the prisoners;

²*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.*" In essence, God has not forgotten you and will come to your rescue. This becomes true. After years of exile, God delivers the people of God from Babylon and restores Jerusalem.

What Jesus would do

The fore-telling comes as Jesus would quote these words 700 years later in a small synagogue in Nazareth. Jesus was invited as a visiting rabbi to read and comment on the scroll of the day. In Luke 4 it records what happened:

He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

When the hometown people in Nazareth heard this, they were confused. First of all, a rabbi was to quote the wisdom of other famous rabbis to comment on a passage. Jesus read the scripture but quoted no one. Secondly, he pointed to himself as the fulfillment of that prophecy. They all knew this passage was a reference to the coming Messiah. Isaiah was packed with signs, prophecies, and descriptions about the Messiah. How could this boy from their hometown be the ruler to set them free? They wanted a Messiah to crush their enemies. What could Jesus of Nazareth do? He is not the Messiah they wanted!

Jesus works from the inside out

Jesus was not surprised by their response. He knew that familiar can prevent us from seeing the holy. Often what people want and expect is different from what they need. Would overthrowing the Romans solve all their political and social issues? No, the hearts of men and women were corrupt in their religious and civic leaders as well. God’s Messiah (sent one, anointed one) would save and transform the world from the inside out. Notice the difference with this Messiah:

1. The first time God used leaders like Cyrus the Persian to release and send home the Jews to Jerusalem. This time God sends his son Jesus to set up his kingdom one by one in the heart of every man, woman and child. The Messiah would anoint his people by pouring his Spirit into them. The good news is that they each would become his temple, his dwelling place. Immanuel, God with us, would be always, everywhere, physically and spiritually true. God’s kingdom, the New Jerusalem is wherever God rules in the lives of his people throughout the world. Know that wherever you go today, God is with you and me.

2. The freedoms that came as the Israelites returned to Jerusalem were political (as they could self-govern) and religious (as they gathered to rebuild the temple and worship). The freedom Jesus brings as our Messiah is much, much greater. Jesus brings us freedom from the curse of death, the eyes of our hearts are opened to see the goodness and love of God. In partnership with God’s Spirit we are set free from selfish and harmful ways of thinking that curse the world. As you and I depend upon and center ourselves in Jesus, we find freedom to live in new ways.

Prayers of release

A helpful way to experience freedom each day is through prayers of release. There are burdens, fears, and responsibilities that weigh on you and me daily. A simple way to give those over to God is through prayer. Clench your hands very tightly. As you do that, invite one burden you carry to come to mind. It may be the name of a person. It might be an issue or task with which you are struggling. Allow yourself to feel the weight of that burden. How does it feel? Now, as you are ready, release this burden to God. Ask God to take it and work in your situation. Be ready to do whatever you sense God is directing you to do, but keep releasing the burden to God as many times as there is a need.

What Jesus expect from us

This Advent season we remember and celebrate that the Messiah foretold in the ancient scriptures as come to pass. Jesus the Messiah has come and now is birthing his life in every open heart. As we say to God, “*Here I am. Send me*” we will experience that new life and freedom. We move from the sidelines into the heart of what God is doing. There we are anointed for holy work. What is our holy work? We do the same work as Jesus. We announce good news to the poor, the prisoner, the blind and the oppressed.

This holy work looks different for each person.

- For some, it fleshes out as they visit people who are homebound, in the hospital, or in prison.
- For others God uses their gift of administration to organize fundraisers for non-profits or to help resettle refugees in our city.
- Many of you are educators and have the ministry mentoring students to be wise, fruitful, and compassionate in the world.
- I know many of you have dedicated yourselves, your families, your professions, and even businesses to be used by God. Our good friend, Milt Morgan, passed away last Friday. I have always admired the humble way he and Lois quietly served this church and our community. They saw themselves as investors of God’s resources. They prayerfully managed what they had to do the most good for others. Thank you, Milt and Lois. May we wisely and joyfully follow in your footsteps.

We started today thinking about what kind of Messiah do we need today? We need a Messiah who came and lived among us as Jesus did. We need a Messiah who has the power to free us from our self-destructive habits. We need a Messiah who pulls us from the sidelines of life to the heart of what God is doing. We need a Messiah who will walk with us and live in us each moment. We need a Messiah who will anoint and fill us with His Holy Spirit so we can accomplish the good work we were created to do!