

↳ 4th - grade doesn't launch with a class party. → 2nd coming

Advent III – 2023

Gospel:
Old Testament:
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

2. OT today, b/c it's quoted by JTB. The fulfillment is at hand. It won't unfold as

¹The 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.

you expect.

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. 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.

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.

“They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.” In the name...

Welcome to the heart of Advent, friends.

As many of you know, we live just off of historic Classen Boulevard in the heart of Uptown/Western District in a 100-year old bungalow. As far as Classen is concerned, you have the original six-lane throughfare of OKC, which is buzzing day and night with cars connecting from NW Expressway to Downtown; but head east on 38th, you take a step back in time to an older and slower sleepy OKC of the past. Because of our proximity, however, to Classen, you have lots of transients walking up and down the sidewalks—on their way to sell Curbside magazine on the major corners or find a new place to bed down for the night. Risking her embarrassment, I've come home on numerous occasions to find the greatest among us—the homeless or the unemployed, weeding our gardens, washing our windows, turning over our raised beds in the back, or cutting tree limbs. My wife has a secret love of providing employment for any who might seek it. In fact, we have a few who are return customers—knowing that my wife will never turn away someone who's willing to put a spade in the ground

and work for a few hours at the never ending projects that lie dormant at our home of never ending activity. A couple of times I've arrived at home just in time to drive them home, or back to the apartment of a friend where they're crashing. Which is to say, I've noticed in my own wife a certain prophetic predisposition. She's never feared the community in need; she talks to them as if they're the mayor of Oklahoma City; she encourages our children to go out in the yard and work with them, talk with them. I've even found a kid or two emptying their own piggy banks to add a dollar or two more to the pot. A couple of them have been really good at their work. A couple of them have been distracted and mediocre. One of them is apparently borrowing my rake for another year as he rakes the leaves of others along Classen. All of them belong to God, and all of them have spoken of God's love to us.

Isaiah, as I'm sure you've guessed, is speaking to a people in exile and hardship. You will find whole vicious chapters in which he condemns those who are the workers of injustice and pain the lives of others—primarily their own countrymen, but also the strangers around them.

So you could imagine that when they finally get to a chapter such as this, their spirits begin to lift.

And of course, he speaks of Jesus. Jesus is the glory of God. Jesus is the anointed one who brings the forms of permanent justice into the world. Jesus is the one who brings good news. Jesus is the proclamation of God's favor toward you and toward the whole world.

We, are the recipients of that same favor and we are named in the passage written some 2700 years ago—we are the oaks of righteousness by virtue of having received that same favor. We are the ones, who in the course of this Advent season of simplicity and return, who were oppressed, brokenhearted, captive, prisoners, those who mourn, and those faint of spirit. Sounds like 2020³ to me.

And what does this good news of Jesus bring us? Liberty. Release. Favor. Comfort. A new garland instead of ashes. Gladness. Praise. We are the oaks because of Jesus. That's why he says that we are the very glory of God. Not because we came happy, but because he poured happiness out. Not because we came unbroken, but because he has bound us up.

He then gives us (the oaks) a job—a vocation:

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. 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.

It's in that paragraph that I see in my wife and of a thousand others a certain fulfillment of the passage. There's no photo-op here. No Instagram page. Just faithful presence among the former devastations.

And then the prophet does something quite beautiful in the passage. He sings a song of praise:

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.

He praises God! We praise God! Isaiah does not give us a series of "I'm a good guy" statements. He gives us God. Praise God for the gift of Jesus, the gift of his people, the gift of small gestures of justice in a world of radical uncertainty and hate. That is the spirit of Advent. That's the spirit of the third candle. Rejoicing in the Lord.

At this altar, we find liberty. We find release. We find favor. We find comfort. It is here that we receive a new garland instead of ashes. Gladness instead of despair. Praise instead of shame. It is here that we are made oaks because of Jesus. It is here that you are the very glory of God.

In the name...