

Devotional
“The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me”
Isaiah 61: 1-11

Monday: “Good News” - Isaiah 61: 1-2

Christmas is quickly approaching, with all of the preparations that go with it. But for Christians, Christmas is also radically different. In a world that tells us that it is all about us, Christmas reminds us as Christians we are called to model the life of Christ during the holiday season, and year round. To lay down our lives for others. To bring good news to the poor in spirit. To love our brothers and sisters more than material possessions. To give to those in need. To love in our actions, that show that we believe what we say we believe.

Those are pretty big things that we are called to model. A way of living that is so contrary to the self-indulgence of the world. In fact, God is using our actions that model the life of Christ to combat evil and despair in this world. You are working on the front lines for the Kingdom of God when you show the love of Christ! Have you ever paused and thought about that. We are not living a way that is radically different because it's the nice thing to do or because we are supposed to. But because we are God's agents of grace in this world communicating the gospel truth. And participation is not optional for those of us who claim to be Christians. You are being sent, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

How do you celebrate the Christmas season because of your faith?

Prayer: God, we confess that sometimes we get caught up in the busyness of the season to the point where it is hard for us to remember that it exists to proclaim your Good News. Your Kingdom come in Christ. Lord, help us to reclaim this season, and all that it represents, in our hearts, we pray. Amen.

Tuesday: “Provide” - Isaiah 61:3-4

Isaiah continues on to say that during those days of freedom and deliverance, there will be provision for those who mourn. It doesn't quite go as far as the popular passage from Revelation read at funerals about how there will be no more crying, no more pain. But Isaiah does say that those who are mourning, perhaps even and especially during this season.

They will find life anew. Their ashes, a sign of mourning, will be replaced by garlands, often associated with joy. There will be an oil of gladness, an anointing similar to that of those stepping into new positions and seasons of life. A mantle passed on to them of praise.

When we are deep in grief, it is so hard to imagine the newness that this passage presents. It's hard to believe that there will ever be joy in our lives again. Or we try to rush to this stage, so quickly trying to bury and move past our grief, that we do not take time to fully mourn that which we have lost.

How can you minister to someone who is grieving this season?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for promising us that even in times of grief that you will provide for us. Thank you for being with us through the darkest moments of our life and walking with us. Let us share your power and presence with others hurting in this world, we pray. Amen.

Wednesday: “Strangers” - Isaiah 61: 5-7

Leading up to Christmas is one of my favorite times to live in a community, because we often see strangers reaching out to strangers. Through food collections, blessing boxes, gifts for nursing home residents, mitten trees and so many other ways.

But perhaps one of my favorite ways that we bless strangers is simply by reaching out in kindness. Letting people go ahead of you in line. Smiling at folks. Offering to pay for someone's cup of coffee or groceries. Kindness abounds during this season.

But we do not only give to strangers, but we have the opportunity to receive from them. To be humbly blessed by another. For we are truly in community together.

What is one way that you have been blessed by a stranger?

Prayer: God, we thank you that you do not make us go through this life alone. Instead, we are in community with other people, strangers and family alike. Let us be blessed and be a blessing, we pray. Amen.

Thursday: "Justice" - Isaiah 61: 8-9

What do you think of when you hear the word "justice"? Often people think of a court system. Or the checks and balances that we have in society. But is that what God is talking about in this particular passage?

When the Lord says that he loves justice, I think he isn't just talking about the administration of the law, but also what is fair, what is true, what is honoring to God. Micah 6:8 weaves together God's idea of justice with humility and kindness.

As Christians our ethics, or moral guiding principles, should be noticeably different from the world. Here, the prophet instructs the people they are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God. Do we do these things in our daily lives? Do we *do* justice? Do we live into it? Do we *love* kindness? Especially when it means being kind to those who have mistreated us? And do we seek to grow in our relationship with God so that we too are changed?

What are some things you can do in your daily life to do justice? Love mercy? Walk humbly with God?

Prayer: Lord, free us to live as you would have us live. We know at times it is difficult in this world, Lord, but guide our hands and feet. Change our hearts and minds. And always and forever, let us grow more deeply in love with you. Amen.

Friday: "Rejoice" - Isaiah 61: 10-11

This week we celebrated the third Sunday of Advent, the Sunday of Joy. We reflect upon the joy that we have in the coming of the Christ child, but we also hear the call of Isaiah to rejoice. The prophet Isaiah encouraged the people to exalt God!

Today we continue to have that joy in our hearts that spills out of our lives. It leads to rejoicing among God's people.

Centuries ago, Mary had her heart fill with joy as well, that burst out of her in the Magnificat - a song of God's love, mercy, and grace. May our hearts continue to sing that song today, for the whole world to hear.

How do you rejoice in God?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for going so far all for our sake, even when we failed to love you as we should. Thank you for speaking to our hearts again and again and again. Amen.