

# December 13, 2020

## Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 • Psalm 126 •  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 • John 1:6-8, 19-28



## St. John United Church of Christ

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Prayers and Liturgy by Rev. Susan Blain

***Readings for this Sunday***

**Week Three:** *Certainly, the readings today shift in tone and imagery from the lament and confusion of the first two Advent Sundays. There is an energetic, confident tone to the readings, taking realistic note of destruction and pain, but giving voice to determination to rebuild and restore a broken world. God's Spirit is at work anointing people to this future-building, and the dominant image throughout the readings is Joy. "Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice" is the refrain in the readings. The traditional name for the third Sunday of Advent is "Gaudete Sunday", from the Latin word for "rejoice" in Philippians 4: 4-5 (Gaudete in Domino semper: Rejoice in the Lord always...the Lord is near.) Advent 3 year B echoes this in*

*1 Thessalonians 5. The English word "gaudy" comes from this Latin root, and gives a sense of the tone of this day. Pink/rose, (a gaudy "hot" pink?) the color alerting the world to the coming of dawn, is the color of this week's Advent readings.*

### ***Light the first, second and third candles:***

O Holy One, we light this third candle,  
And delight in the sparkle of its outrageous reminder  
to "rejoice"!

Let its flame cast light into shadowy places

and show where work is to be done.  
Let a community of builders be formed in  
The Light of Joy.  
Let Joy find home in our hearts,  
And make space for your presence there,  
As we work for justice and peace in the service of  
Love.  
God be with us in this Light of Joy.

**CALL TO WORSHIP:**

Rejoice!  
The spirit of God is sending us:  
to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to comfort the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
to proclaim the year of favor among God's people.  
Rejoice!  
The work of the Spirit is calling us:  
To rebuild ancient relationships ruined by injustice,  
To repair the cities as places of hope,  
To restore land devastated across generations.  
to proclaim the year of favor among God's people.  
Rejoice!  
The Glory of the Spirit is leading us:  
To cast off any faint spirit  
and put on the mantle of praise,  
To take root as the plantings of the HOLY ONE,  
to display God's glory.  
Come, let us worship in Joy!



Holy One, Builder who delights  
in making spaces of safety and beauty,  
Matchmaker who rejoices  
in presenting new spouses with a future of hope,  
fill us today with the gifts we need  
to join you in your life-sustaining, hope-giving work  
in the world;  
let us share your joyful vision  
of beauty and justice  
in this world you have created and loved.  
In the name of the One who is coming,  
Amen

*A NOTE FROM PASTOR ROSEMARY: Again, this Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, we are looking at the text in the book of Isaiah in the First (Old) Testament. The authors of this book were writing at the time of the Babylonian exile of the Hebrew people. The prophets were trying to reassure the captives that God heard their cries and tears as they were forced to live hundreds of miles from their homes in Judea. Even though their temple had been destroyed, they yearned for a leader who could release them from captivity. They yearned for the opportunity to practice their rituals, prayers, and hymns openly.*

*I believe we can relate to their experiences as we are held captive by Covid 19, keeping us from gathering in our sanctuary to practice our rituals, prayers, and hymns together, as we endeavor to remain hopeful and faithful to God.*

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

**SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

**61** The LORD God's spirit is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me.

He has sent me

to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release for captives,  
and liberation for prisoners,

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and a day of vindication for our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,

<sup>3</sup> to provide for Zion's mourners,  
to give them a crown in place of ashes,  
oil of joy in place of mourning,  
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.

They will be called Oaks of Righteousness,  
planted by the LORD to glorify himself.

<sup>4</sup> They will rebuild the ancient ruins;  
they will restore formerly deserted places;  
they will renew ruined cities,  
places deserted in generations past.

<sup>8</sup> I, the LORD, love justice;  
I hate robbery and dishonesty.

I will faithfully give them their wage,

and make with them an enduring covenant.

<sup>9</sup> Their offspring will be known among the nations,  
and their descendants among the peoples.

All who see them will recognize  
that they are a people blessed by the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> I surely rejoice in the LORD;  
my heart is joyful because of my God,  
because he has clothed me with clothes of victory,  
wrapped me in a robe of righteousness  
like a bridegroom in a priestly crown,  
and like a bride adorned in jewelry.

<sup>11</sup> As the earth puts out its growth,  
and as a garden grows its seeds,  
so the LORD God will grow righteousness and  
praise before all the nations.



**MESSAGE: "Finding Joy"** with  
thoughts from Dr. Gene M.  
Tucker.

Reading Hebrew poetry, like the  
scripture text we have before us, is difficult for us  
westerners. We don't talk the way they wrote 2500  
years ago or so. Sometimes they use imagery not  
familiar to us, such as in verse 3. "Provide the  
mourners with a crown instead of ashes. Oil of joy.  
A mantle of praise." By the way, a mantle was an

outer cloak that was essentially used as a blanket. So, I'll try to walk us through this passage to glean God's message to us today.

First is the problem of who is speaking. The passage opens with a declaration statement about God, (verses 1-4), then God presumably speaks, (verses 5-9), and finally it might be the community communicating (verses 10-11).

In verses 1-4 a figure speaks about a commission for a task, the objectives of the task and the consequences of the task. The entire content of this section is very similar to the so-called Suffering Servant poems found in earlier Isaiah texts. We don't know who this figure is or who the suffering servant was. The early church wanted to point to Jesus as this figure and the suffering servant. However, modern scholarship is doubtful that an ancient prophecy about Jesus would have meant much to a generation that lived hundreds of years before his birth. In other words, whomever this figure is, he/she would have been known to the audience who first heard this text.

No one knows the identity of this figure. Part of the description of the commission, especially the anointing, suggests a royal figure. In ancient Israel to speak of the anointed one (the Messiah) was to speak of the king.

So, we don't know who this person is, yet he/she is bringing good news of deliverance and glorification to the Hebrews who are in exile. In verses 8-9, God declares God's love of justice and dislike of the opposite, and God promises the renewal of the covenant, the reestablishment of the proper relationship between the people and the Deity. This new status of the people – restored and blessed as they enter a newly rebuilt land (when they return to Judea) – would give them respect and thus grant them the opposite of their former status which had made them the laughingstock of their enemies (see Psalm 80:6). Reread verses 8-9.

In verses 10-11 the speaker again is difficult to determine. It may be the anointed figure of verses 1-4 or perhaps even the community speaking as a collective "I". We can also read some metaphors as expressed by the recipients. For example, newness is expressed in terms of clothing – garments of salvation, robe of righteousness, and wedding attire. The new inner state manifests itself in the outer person. Secondly, the newness of righteousness and praise springs forth like a new vegetation growing among the nations; it is only the beginning, but at least a beginning.

Now that you better understand a little bit about Hebrew poetry, what does this message mean for



us? It means better days are coming for us. We will soon rid our world of this terrible pandemic. We will soon be delivered into “new” people. How do we know this? Because God is sending his Son to us, even in the middle of our cries for justice. God is sending Jesus to live among us to bring us hope, peace, joy, and love to us all. So, stay tuned. Stay faithful to God, as God is faithful to us. Amen.

#### **PASTORAL PRAYERS:**

God of the past and of the future, you speak to us always, but sometimes we need help sorting out your revelations to us. You speak to those 3000 years ago, and you speak to all people around the world today, in every language, and even to those without hearing or sight. Yet, your message for all of us is unending and always clear. You love us now and to the end of time. You care for us in all our situations. We can never ask for anything better.

Today we want to lift up in our hearts people you have send to care for us; all the first-responders, nurses, doctors, and technicians. And we are especially thankful for the scientists you have sent to discover a vaccine to help us, as we continue to listen to the scientists who are trying to help us now during the worst of these times of illness and death. We wear our masks, wash our hands, and remain



distant from others. We know the day will come when we can get together again with our family, friends, and our church family and we will rejoice and give you, most Holy One, all the glory for all you have done for us. And now we pray the prayer your Son taught us . . .

**Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**THANK YOU FOR SHARING:** *(Please send your offerings to the address on the front page.)*

In struggle and in joy, God is faithful to us. We bring forth our offerings – our tithes, our treasures, our least coins – to demonstrate our faithfulness to God.

#### **DEDICATION:**

O Faithful One, accept these gifts of our hearts and may they be multiplied and magnified as the living presence of Christ in the world. Amen.

#### **BENEDICTION:**

Go forth confident that God is faithful:  
Those who have sowed in sorrow will return with shouts of joy

Bearing the harvest of God's work.  
Rejoice always—the Lord is near. Amen.



**PRAYER LIST:** Rich Schmitt, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Amy Annis, Janice Petroff.

