

Notes for Next Sunday

Third Sunday in Advent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11). The Servant/Messiah will come, bringing good news and everlasting joy to the redeemed of Israel. As brokenhearted souls, we must confess the sinful cause of our poverty and brokenness. Our dire straits are due to our sinful condition—a condition from which we cannot free ourselves. Jesus brings liberty for all held captive by sin and death. By His death and resurrection, He has delivered us from the shame of our sin, clothed us in His own righteousness, and made us to be His holy priests.

Epistle (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24). Paul gives both his final instruction about leadership and a benediction. Christians should support and encourage one another. We should respect the elders and leaders of our congregations because of their work for the Lord and the whole people of God. The Lord Jesus, by humbling Himself to the point of washing His disciples' feet, showed to us the love He has for all believers.

Gospel (John 1:6-8, 19-28)

St. John introduces us to the Baptist's mission: he is the supporting player, the best man at the wedding. He came to offer a true witness to the Light so that all people could have the opportunity to believe in the Messiah. John prepared people for the arrival of the Light, whose coming had long been proclaimed by the ancient prophets. John testifies to Jewish leaders asking, "Who are you?" that he is not the Christ but was sent to prepare the way for Him. As a faithful servant, John sets an example of humility and reverence for us. Ironically, the One whose sandal John was unworthy to untie became the Suffering Servant, who bore all our sins.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.⁸ "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them."⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed."¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

61:1 Spirit ... is on me. Jesus is not coming by his own impulse, nor by any other human catalyst, but by the Holy Spirit.

61:1 bind up the brokenhearted. This can include all that are deeply grieved over their sins as well as those that have been all but crushed by life's adversities. (Leupold)

61:2 year of the LORD's favor. Note that the Lord's favor is a *year* and in contrast the day of vengeance is only a *day*. God is known for his mercy and compassion. But, he is a just God and will judge those who refuse his free mercy.

61:3 garment of praise. The mourner with ashes on the head, wrapped in sackcloth, and with a spirit crushed with despair, is replaced by one who celebrates with a beautiful headdress, smelling of costly oil, and wearing a garment of praise. (TLSB)

61:3 oaks of righteousness. This is an act by God who plants it and helps it to grow like he does with Christians. It is his intervening action. Oaks are tree of great strength and endurance. They are often a haven for all kinds of wildlife. They were rare in that climate just as Christians are the minority in much of society.

61:10 garments of salvation. Those whom the Lord wraps in this robe not only experience deliverance from unrighteousness but also power to live out His righteousness. (TLSB)

61:10 head like a priest. This is likened to the meticulous care employed by the priest as he equips himself for the performance of his sacred duties. (Leupold)

61:11 a garden. The imagery in this verse echoes the botanical description at the end of verse 3, the Lord will make salvation and righteousness grow throughout the world like a garden, hinting of paradise restored. It is the Lord, both sovereign and gracious, who causes salvation to grow and encompass the nations of the world, foreshadowing the inclusion of gentiles in the church.

EPISTLE – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

¹⁶ Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹ Test everything. Hold on to the good. ²² Avoid every kind of evil. ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

5:16 be joyful always. In this world we know much of sorrow, frustration, adversity, and guilt, and yet we are told to rejoice. Paul knew that affliction and deep joy may go together (2 Cor 6:10). He could rejoice in tribulation (Rom 5:3; Acts 16:25). He and the Thessalonians knew the truth of Jesus' promise that "no one will take away your joy" (John 16:22). Jesus carried his cross in joyful determination, bent (literally) on the world's salvation. Joy is fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). The present tense calls for a continual attitude of rejoicing. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

5:17 pray continually. We cannot verbally pray at all times, but it is possible to be in the spirit of prayer and ever ready to pray. "The Lord's Prayer has also been prescribed so that we should see and consider the distress that ought to drive and compel us to pray without ceasing" (LC III 24). "We should ask that through the same Spirit and His grace, by means of the daily exercise of reading and doing God's Word, He would preserve in us faith and His heavenly gifts, strengthen us from day to day, and keep us to the end" (FCSD II 16). (TLSB)

5:18 give thanks. No circumstance in life is an excuse for not being thankful. God's mercy never ceases, therefore we should never cease thanking him. We praise God both when he gives and when he takes away. Worldly people are discontent even when they live like kings. Christians are thankful even when they live in the dumps. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 1)

5:19-22 After providing his readers with three dos, Paul addresses three don'ts: don't quench the Spirit, don't despise prophecies, and don't give in to evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 22, Part 1)

5:21 Test everything. Consistency with the Gospel message would be one test. Another test is the prophet's testimony to Christ; will for their specific situation and for the future. (TLSB)

5:24 one who calls...will do it. God has called us and is calling us through His Word. The initiative is from Him. From God's calling in His Gospel, we can know that He has elected us unto salvation. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – John 1:6-8, 19-28

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. ¹⁹ Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. ²⁰ He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." ²² Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" ²⁴ Now some Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

1:6 there came a man. God deals with men through agents similar to themselves, namely, men in order that they may the more readily take and accept His office of love. (Buls)

1:7 that through him all men might believe. † People were not to believe "in" John the Baptist but "through" him. Similarly, the writer's purpose was that the readers believe and continue to believe in Christ; he uses the verb "believe" 98 times. (CSB)

1:8 only as a witness to the light. John was very careful not to detract from *the* Light, as verses 19-28 will clearly show. (Buls)

1:19 Levites. Probably members of the Sanhedrin Council. They would have understood issues surrounding ritual purification (i.e, baptism) raised by John's ministry. (TLSB)

1:20 I. Emphatic, contrasting John the Baptist (or Baptizer) with someone else. Throughout the following verses this emphatic "I" occurs frequently, and almost invariably there is an implied contrast with Jesus, who is always given the higher place. (CSB)

1:22 make straight. Through John's preaching of repentance and Baptism, God prepared people spiritually. (TLSB)

1:22 Pharisees. The conservative religious party, who probed deeper than the rest of the delegation (v. 19). (CSB)

1:27 whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. Compared to the Son of God, John was unworthy of even a slave's task. (TLSB)