

“The Lord’s Anointed”

Isaiah 61:1-3

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we bring our Advent/Lent Sermon Series on the Messianic Prophecies of Isaiah to a close, all of the Servant songs and prophetic words of Isaiah come to a head in these few verses in Chapter 61. The one anointed by Yahweh to rule over Zion now speaks, and these are the words of the Messiah—the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And we can say that with the utmost certainty because of Jesus’ use of this passage when He teaches in the synagogue in Nazareth. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus reads these words from the scroll of Isaiah, and then proclaims in verse 21, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” He stands before the Jews of His hometown and proclaims these words to be about Him, the One who has come into the world for the sole purpose of their salvation. And their response? They run Him out of town and try to throw Him off a cliff. Even still, the Lord’s favor goes out to them as the Messiah goes to the cross to redeem them from their sin. He is the Lord’s Anointed, and He will prevail in accomplishing the Father’s will of salvation.

It is the will of the Lord that the good news be brought to the poor. He has anointed His Son for this very task, and that is exactly what Jesus does. This prophecy is echoed in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The term “poor” here does not mean financially destitute. It means those who are poor in spirit as Christ says. He speaks of those who are lost in their sinful nature and in need of regeneration, which is all mankind. We were all once poor, and we still fall back into the impoverished lifestyle of sin. That is something that we cannot escape no matter how hard we try. Because we have no ability to escape our spiritual poverty as those who bear the sinful flesh. The Old Adam that lives in us all is working overtime to prevent us from obtaining the riches of God’s grace.

But the Lord brings relief in the form of the good news of the Messiah. He brings relief in the forgiveness of sins offered to all through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is how he binds up the brokenhearted. People who are lost in their sins do a very good job of beating themselves up over it, believing that they are so depraved that no one, especially Jesus, could possibly love them. Their hearts break for the lack of love they think is present in their lives, and so they sink further and further into their sins to find a false and worldly comfort in them. They have become captives of their sinful nature—shackled to their Old Adam instead of drowning him in the waters of Holy Baptism. It’s

a temptation that the evil one uses against us all at every opportunity. He seeks our demise and the abandonment of our faith, so that he can claim us as his prisoners.

But Jesus has come to free the captives, to proclaim liberty to those who are captured and held prisoner in the bonds of sin by the devil. Those held captive and bound in prison are broken out by the One who has come into the world to die in their place. He came to shed His own blood that theirs would not be demanded as payment for their sins by our just and righteous God. There is no prison house, no bonds of captivity that can hold the believer in Christ because we have received freedom and liberation as those who have been baptized into His death. That is what it truly means to receive the Lord's favor. It means to be utterly unworthy of His gifts, completely depraved and deserving of nothing but death, and yet receive nothing but His love in the forgiveness of sins offered by His precious blood.

The day of His vengeance is coming, when all who reject Him as the Messiah will be called to account for their unbelief. That day is the same as the year of His favor. The Lord Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the Lord's favor as the Word made flesh. He is the One who brings favor and judges all those who seek to undo or impede it. Christ is the one who sits upon the judgment throne, separating all people into sheep and goats and then exercising His will to save His sheep and bring them into His kingdom. That is the culmination and fulfillment of the Lord's favor, but we still receive His favor even now as we look forward to that day. He brings us His favor in the forgiveness of sins that is given in the means of grace. In the preaching of His Holy Word and the right administration of His Holy Sacraments, His favor abounds for those who are in the one true faith.

And through those same means which bestow His favor, He has been anointed to comfort those who mourn. Here again, these words from Isaiah are echoed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Only in Christ can a mourner truly be comforted, because only in faith do we know that we will see our loved ones again. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." As we come to the end of Lent, we are those who mourn. We mourn the death of our Lord and Savior, but we do so with hearts full of joy and promise. The promise of eternal life by His blood comforts all who mourn. The loved ones we have lost rest in the holy presence of Jesus, and there they wait for the resurrection He has promised for all who die as His holy children.

The comfort He gives is His redemption—the forgiveness of sins which His death has wrought for all mankind. By His Holy Word, we receive the treasure of His free gift, and as those who have received it, we have been given a beautiful headdress instead of ashes. We no longer bear the ashes of mourning with which we began this Lententide. That beautiful headdress points us to the hope and joy of Easter morning, when Christ will rise from the dead in His glorified body. And so, He has exchanged our funeral dress of ashes for beautiful wedding garments, anointing us with oil of gladness as we look forward to the marriage feast of Christ and His Church.

The mourning over Christ's death is not done, but we can mourn as those who have received His blessed comfort and hope. Next week as we gather on Palm Sunday, we welcome our Lord Jesus to Jerusalem where He will begin His journey to the cross for the redemption of the world. We gather on Maundy Thursday in remembrance of the Last Supper of Christ and His Apostles. As He gives them His very body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins, He gives us the same in the Supper we celebrate in the Sacrament of the Altar. And on Good Friday, we gather in silence and darkness to remember the sacrifice of our Savior, the Messiah who has come into the world to redeem all people. He has gone to the cross, been crucified and died so that you will never have to face the possibility of eternal death.

But we depart that evening in reserved joy, as we look with longing eyes to the tomb on Easter morning, knowing that He has burst forth from the bonds of death and nullified all mourning and sadness. The strength He has given us in our faith is necessary for us to look with such hope to that day. Having received the justification which He has won for us at Calvary and solidified for us by His resurrection, our faith stands strong, as an oak of righteousness. To be an oak of righteousness is to stand and remain as one who has been baptized into the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. By His dying and rising, His glory has been shown to the world. We have been planted as solid oaks of His righteousness, so that the Lord's Anointed might be glorified in and through us. For we have been adopted into sonship as His holy people, and as such will stand firm until the end, when we will be brought into His glory to dwell in eternal bliss forever. Amen.