

Sermon: Healing joy  
3 Advent, Year B; Gaudete Sunday  
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; John 1:6-8, 19-28

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“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon us!”

Today, the third Sunday in Advent is sometimes referred to as Gaudete Sunday, based on the Latin for “rejoice”. That pink candle on our Advent wreath symbolizes joy. Looking at our first three readings, they are full of references to joy: from Isaiah, “I will greatly *rejoice* in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God.” And Psalm 126 mentions “joy” three times, and 1 Thessalonians says, “*Rejoice* always.” So why all the joy? Don’t the writers read the newspapers? Don’t they get headaches and don’t their children misbehave? Don’t they know that our loved ones die, our healthcare system dangles precariously and our politics are in shambles?

It’s interesting that this passage from Isaiah is one of the passages often used at funerals. Why would that be? Aren’t we allowed to be sad at a funeral? Aren’t we allowed to be outraged at injustice? Aren’t we allowed to feel discouraged when people mistreat one another? Are these writers in deep denial of the pain and suffering in this world? Don’t they know life can be a nightmare sometimes? Don’t they know that the world is broken?

Well, in fact they did know all of this and more. Both Isaiah and the psalmist and the Apostle Paul who wrote these passages had first- hand knowledge of the pain in this world. They had seen the ravages of violence and war; had experienced imprisonment and injustice; had known bitter disappointment. And yet they knew that God was at work in the midst of all of life enabling healing, renewal and reconciliation, beckoning God’s people to *recognize* and to name the brokenness around them but to be agents of God’s reconciling and healing love. And with that divine hope of healing, comes joy. Healing joy.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” Isaiah writes, “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 the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor...to comfort all who mourn...They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations, they shall repair ruined cities...For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” And when these things occur, as Isaiah becomes God’s agent of healing the broken, he says, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God.” And the Psalmist writes, “Those who sowed with tears\* will reap with songs of joy.”

The Spirit that was upon Isaiah or upon the Servant that Isaiah portrayed is upon *all of us* as children of God, as followers of Christ. And we have been given an incredible opportunity to let God’s healing power move through us. English priest Robert Benson wrote, *To embrace one's brokenness, whatever it looks like, whatever has caused it, carries within it the possibility that one might come to embrace one's healing, and then one might come to the next step: to embrace another and their brokenness and their possibility for being healed. To avoid one's brokenness is to turn one's back on the possibility that the Healer might be at work here, perhaps for you, perhaps for another.*

We are not powerless as we confront the pain of the world! We can name the brokenness we see and experience but we do not have to be defined by it. Because our identity is in a God who heals we have power to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort those who mourn, to build up ancient ruins, to repair ruined cities, to be instruments of justice – each in our own unique ways. As individual children of God and even more so as a collective body of faith, we are called to be reconciled to God, to be in union with God and therefore agents of reconciliation wherever we see the need.

The third Sunday of the month is healing Sunday. Today our healing team of Jim Lott and Teresa Hester will be at the back of the church during communion time as usual to offer healing prayer for you or on behalf of someone else. But today we will also offer anointing of a different sort. The Rev. Webster Maughan will anoint each of you who chooses to receive it as *healers*. May you be healing vessels in your own unique situations, and look to God for the power and grace that we cannot muster all by ourselves. As the Rev. Maughan anoints you with oil, he will say, *“The Spirit of the Lord help you to heal the world.”*

Today may the Holy Spirit through the church anoint you, encourage you, equip you as a healer, as one

Who sees and hears the pain and brokenness in the world even though that is sometimes a frightening place to be but may you also be one:

Who speaks words of healing and reconciliation.

Who prays for restoration.

Who comforts the brokenhearted.

Who works for justice.

Who bubbles over with joy.

May the Spirit of the Lord help you heal the world with great joy.

Amen.