

Good News Still Being Fulfilled 2022
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 Luke 4:14-21

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, 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 to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Luke 4:14-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Several layers back into the settings section on my cellphone,
there is an option: **Factory data reset**, which is described:

"Reset your phone to its factory settings. This will erase all data, including files and downloaded apps."

There have been times when I needed to have a setting like that
for something I've said or done that was hurtful or went wrong.

**Wouldn't it be great to reset, to delete our mistakes and failures
and go back for a replay or a re-do, for a 2nd chance to get it right.**

But the truth is, **human beings don't come with a reset option,**
and we don't get through life in this troubled world
without a few things we've said or done that we later regret

or hurtful and harmful things that were done or said to us ...
... and any of it may still influence, disturb and haunt us.

In various ways, at various times and circumstances
we've all been wounded and scarred, we are all imperfect,
just as the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 3:23
"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Our world is broken because it's filled with broken people.
However, that is not the end of the story
for God does not leave us mangled and bleeding in the dust.

When the passage we read from Isaiah was written,
the people of Israel were suffering through the Babylonian exile.

But as unpleasant, difficult and crushing as that experience was,
perhaps the worst part **was knowing**
that despite centuries of warnings through the prophets,
the hammer had finally come down hard as the consequence
for idolatry, injustice and rejecting the ways of God ...
... **knowing** as a nation and people, that **we did this to ourselves.**

And writing to a broken, struggling and disappointed people,
this passage offers a wonderful promise of hope and restoration,
that Israel would return to rebuild their homes and nation...
... **and that it was all grace – entirely a gift from God.**

It was all God, not something they earned or deserved for good deeds.
These were words of hope and reassurance from the Lord God
who would graciously bless and liberate the people of God.

**The God of Scripture is a God of grace, goodness and relationships,
with mercy and compassion for our human struggles and failings.**

Listen for the hope and promise being proclaimed, vs. 1-2.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, 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 to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

the day of vengeance of our God, is truly a fascinating phrase
that almost seems out of place in this text of encouragement.

That phrase vengeance of our God refers to the justice of the Lord
against those who oppress and exploit the poor and powerless.

Continuing with God's proclamation through Isaiah, vs. 3, 11

They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, **to display his glory.** For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise **to spring up before all the nations.**

**Simply put, God would act graciously and generously toward Israel,
and in turn they were to reveal and reflect that grace to the world,
as a sign of hope, as a light revealing God's gracious glory.**

What Isaiah wrote about God's grace and healing toward Israel
would later be fulfilled by the life and ministry of Jesus, Jn 8:12,

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

The author of Luke is very intentional in letting the reader know,
that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, Luke 4:1-2.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. ...

... and immediately afterward, where our reading today began, vs. 14

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, ...

... all of which is to point toward Isaiah's declaration, vs. 1

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, ...

And then Luke informs us, vs. 16-19

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day ... He stood up to read ... and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus ends the quote from Isaiah, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And instead of including the part about vengeance of the Lord,
he declares, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"
or as he will explain in John 3:17,

Indeed, God did **not** send the Son into the world to **condemn the world**, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Isaiah's message was a call to the nation of Israel,
but the nation **did not fulfill** that call from God.

In contrast, Jesus was faithful & did fulfill God's purpose and call,
not with vengeance, but with healing, with grace, peace and love.

This passage, that comes very early in Luke's Gospel, it's intended
to announce **who Jesus is** and **what God sent him to accomplish**,
as had been promised through the Old Testament prophets...

... which led to his self-identifying declaration of vs. 20-21

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "**Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**"

So how had the Isaiah scripture been fulfilled that day?

**It was fulfilled by Jesus being filled with the Holy Spirit
and sent to accomplish the gracious purpose of the Lord,**
for that's what happened in the course of his mission and ministry,
the blind **see**, the unworthy **cleansed**, the broken **leap for joy**.

Isaiah's words match exactly the recorded life and ministry of Jesus,
as led by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom,
giving sight to the blind, the lame made to walk and leap,
the lepers and sick were healed and dead restored to life,
while eating and welcoming sinners and outcasts.

Jesus proclaimed the Good News of God's Kingdom,
where it's all grace, and God does all the heavy lifting
by reaching down to us, unworthy sinners and outcasts
to all of us who can't seem to get it right on our own...

... **a God doesn't wait for us to improve or get it right**
before calling us and drawing us into his gracious love,
hitting the reset option, erasing the data of our sin & failures.

You may recall, in 1976, during our American Bicentennial,
that British Airways ran a particularly memorable ad on TV.

Actor Robert Morley, with his very strong British accent,
while waving a small American flag in front of Parliament,
said something important, "**All is forgiven, come on home.**" ...

... which is a pretty good description of grace through Jesus Christ,
"All is forgiven, come on home."

The religious authorities who opposed Jesus and his mission of grace
taught about an angry God of justice & vengeance, always demanding
that we've got to try harder and do better or face the consequences.

But the Good News Jesus proclaimed was not about doing our good deeds,
rather it's all grace, our God who seeks the lost and discouraged,
who races out to greet and welcome the prodigal son,
who eats with sinners, outcasts and failures,
and promises eternal life to a thief while dying on a cross.

The message from Jesus is whatever our sin, our failure or disaster,
God's gracious love is always way bigger and far more magnificent.

One time a father bought a new car for his daughter graduating HS.
While she was away at college, she got into an accident.
There was a lot of damage, and it was clearly her fault.
She was terrified knowing how angry and upset her father would be.

But as she got out the packet with her insurance information,
she was surprised to find a note from her father tucked inside.

"My dear daughter, if you are reading this, then you are probably upset and have
been involved in an accident. I hope you are not hurt. I also want you to know how much I love
you and that you are way more important to me than any damage done to the car. I have always
loved you and always will, love Dad"

The faithful and fruitful and fulfilling Christian life
is really about learning to live into God's grace and blessings
& learning to trust God's love to mold & gradually reshape us,
toward the unique and beloved we were created to become...

...so that **God's grace overflows, splashing & spilling out onto others,**
and so that we become blessings and hope to our world much in need.

As Christians, the Holy Spirit is present & resides in each one of us,
to live out and proclaim the Good News of God's grace and favor,
as plantings of the Lord **called to blossom with God's glory.**

If indeed, we have received God's saving grace, favor and blessings,
then we no longer belong to ourselves, but Jesus is Lord of our lives

who calls us to live lives **that reflect God's glory...**
... for that is the life, purpose and task to which we are called...

... just as Jesus explained in **Matthew 5:16**,

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Yes, we strive to be faithful and effective disciples who serve,
but there is a huge difference between trying to be religious,
and walking in faithful response with the God who loves us.

Our call and our challenge
is that as those whose lives have been touched by Jesus,
for us to be the encouraging and joyful people of God and hope,
**to live as signs by inviting other people, everyone we can,
to the same hope, healing & wholeness that we've received.**

So why is accepting and living out God's grace such a struggle for us?

I think it's because in our world, our families, schools & employers,
for all our lives from our earliest of childhood onward,
there has always been the pressure to perform well,
to accomplish, **to prove our worth and competence.**

God's grace goes against the pressures we're under in this world,
so no wonder we lose focus, feel insecure and uncomfortable with it.
No wonder we struggle to fully accept and fully trust
the unlimited and unfathomable strength of God's love.

Yes, in response to God's grace we're to strive toward doing our best,
but not as fear-driven perfectionism, it's heartfelt gratitude.

Our call is to live within the amazing wonder of God's grace,
to accept & respond by seeking to know & walk with our God
in an authentic & growing relationship of loving trust.

And even when things go wrong, as we're assured in **Romans 8:28**,
We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

You know, I haven't seen one for many years,
but I remember playing with an **Etch-a-sketch** as a boy.
It was a red and gray box with a screen and two little white knobs,
that you could twist and turn to draw a picture on the screen.

But if you messed up, you just turn it over and shake a couple a times,
then it all disappears and you start over with a clean screen...
... and I think God's grace can work something like that...

...that God embraces us in our brokenness, our failures and weakness
in order to heal and restore us, release us and set us free
so that it may go well with us, walking with the Lord.

**Our task is to look for what God is up to in this or any situation,
to live in a way that reflects the reality of Christ in our lives.**

In his own life and ministry Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's message,
and as followers of Jesus, as the beloved and blessed people of God,

it is our tasks and calling to also live out Isaiah's message:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon us, because the Lord has anointed us; he has sent us to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. You will be called oaks of righteousness, and be the planting of the Lord, to display his glory... so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.