

December 23, 2018

National Presbyterian Church

The Son of David in Isaiah: Great Mission

Isaiah 60:1-3, 61:1-4 (Luke 4)

David Renwick

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*" John 20:21

This December, we've been thinking about the fulfillment of a promise first made by God to a man called Abraham, 1800 years before the birth of Jesus; re-iterated and expanded in the time of Israel's greatest king, King David, 1000 years before the birth of Jesus; and kept alive by Israel's great prophets, for many centuries especially by the prophet Isaiah; until it found its fulfillment in Jesus himself.

The promise was that **Abraham's descendants** would be a source of blessing for the whole earth, and that that blessing would come especially through one person, a descendant of King David, a "Messiah" who would be (according to the prophet Isaiah)

- **A Great Leader** → "divine": *mighty God (9:6)*
- **A Great Healer** → *surprisingly -- through his suffering ("by his wounds, we are healed" 53:5)*
- A person with **A Great Vision** *for the World as it ought to be*

Some of that vision is also in the passages from which we just read a few moments ago in Isaiah 60 and 61, and some is conveyed in passages we read last week from Isaiah 2, 9 and 11 (*specifically, 2:2-4; 9:2-7, 11; and 11:1-9*) where we're told that when the Messiah comes, that

- (9:2) people who walk in darkness will see a great light
- (11:6) the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.
- (2:4) and, because there is now perfect safety and justice, the nations, shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, until there's no need ever to learn war any more.

Of course, the vision is idealistic, never to be fully fulfilled this side of heaven. But, for all that, the vision is clear: **this is what Jesus** (the Messiah, the Descendant of Abraham and David) **wants! This is what he strove for when he lived on earth!**

And more than that, this is the vision that sets the direction that Jesus the Messiah is longing to see IN US TOO! In your life and mine as his followers. We are to

- Become members of Abraham's family – by faith
- Embrace his descendant Jesus – by faith
- Pursue his vision and mission – by faith
- Use the power God gives us as sons and daughters of the King . . .

So that we too can be a source of blessing to the world, doing what Jesus would do if he were here in flesh and blood; what Jesus would do when he came to earth that first Christmas

IS THIS HOW YOU SEE IT? Unfortunately, it's such a big calling that it could easily get lost in its size and grandeur and never materializes into anything that we actually do because we don't know where to start! BUT, not to fear! In our reading in Isaiah 61, especially the specific verses used by Jesus to define HIS mission, in Luke 4, Jesus himself gives us a wonderful down-to-earth place to start.

Let me read Isaiah 61:1-4 again, the words that Jesus uses to define his own mission as the Great Leader, with a Great Vision, on a Great Mission, to bring Great Healing wherever he can in the world. And let me add a few probing questions. This is what Jesus says, quoting Isaiah:

¹The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; **HE HAS SENT ME**
...

Do we have strong sense of mission: that God is sending us into his world, too? Just as he sent Jesus into the world? (John 20:21?)

“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;

Who do I know that needs some kind of release or setting-free this Christmas? Literally? Spiritually?

“HE HAS SENT ME” . . .

- To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
Who needs to hear from you and me that God has the righteous power to sort things out? (We may not like it but the kind of divine power expressed in these words is essential in a world of bullies, who use their power to belittle and intimidate: they need to know that someone else has more power than they do!)

“HE HAS SENT ME” . . .

- 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.

Who has had a hard time, faced a deep loss, and needs a word of grace . . . from me?

“HE HAS SENT ME” . . .

- To display God's glory.
Who needs to see the witness of my life, lived with integrity and faith? Or to be invited to church, to sense the reality and majesty of God?

“HE HAS SENT ME” . . .

- To build up the ancient ruins, and raise up the former devastations; and repair the ruined cities,
What's broken, that god may want me to fix? Systems? Organizations? Relationships?)

This is not just HIS mission – but ours.

Howard Thurman – at one time Dean of Howard University Chapel put it like this in a poem called “The Work of Christmas”

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,

when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

In *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*, Friends United Press.

But it's not just after Christmas that it's work needs to begin: surely it's today as well?

- When the song of the angels is **still overwhelming**
- when the star in the sky is **still moving**
- when the kings and princes are **still seeking and giving**
- when the shepherds are **leaving** their flocks, **and still kneeling.**

Remember Jesus words in John 20:21? – “*Peace be with you!*” he says.

Not just so we could feel wonderful.

But so that we would have the inner strength we need to serve his mission: here's the rest of what he says – *Peace be with you: as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*”

It's a big task -- that **has to start somewhere.**

- Find the place where you can start and make a difference
- And make it your *Christmas gift* to Jesus this year.

David A. Renwick Copyright © 2017 All Rights Reserved.

To listen on line go to: <http://nationalpres.org/sermons>

To watch full services go to: <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/nationalpres>

THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016
www.NationalPres.org 202.537.0800