

Isa. 61:1–4, 8–11

Ps. 126 or

Luke 1:46b–55

1 Thess. 5:16–24

John 1:6–8, 19–28

A Time of Transformation

Goal for the Session

Adults will explore God's proclamation of world transformation in Isaiah 61 and plan ways to participate in it.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," William P. Brown

Zion's response to this pronouncement is total, unabashed joy, with whole heart, mind, and being (vv. 10–11; cf. Deut. 6:5). Her restoration is tantamount to being clothed by God in fine array: garments and jewelry become emblematic of God's saving work (cf. 52:1). Zion thus obtains a new identity as one uniquely blessed by God. The clothes make the city. And as Zion is clothed with new garments, so the earth is clothed with new life. The conclusion of the lection returns to the garden. The earth's fructification is a sign of righteousness resurrected (see also 45:8). God has plotted this restoration with care, wielding not the sword but a garden spade.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Scott Bader-Saye

A restored Israel, living as a jubilee community, will stand as a sign of God's blessing to the nations around it, a kind of sacramental enacting of the salvation toward which it points. To be missional is to live as a people of good news, liberation, justice, and comfort in such a way that the world may take notice and be drawn to the ways of God. Jesus declares himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, the one to bring good news, healing, and release. As we walk through the last days of Advent, we remember not just *that* Jesus came but *why* Jesus came—to usher in a jubilee celebration that would have no end.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Cynthia A. Jarvis

The God who can build up ancient ruins is also the God who can redeem the ruin a prodigal son believes he has made of his life; the God who shall raise up the former devastations is also the God who means to pick up a daughter's broken parts; the God who shall repair the ruined cities and the devastations of many generations is also the God who can repair even the ruined nation that has forgotten its way in the world.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Donald Booz

Advent is a time of waiting and preparation for God to transform the world through Jesus Christ. Isaiah's words tell us that this transformation is not to be an empty hope but a sure promise. God is the Lord of all times and places. Isaiah guarantees that God will cause "righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations" (v. 11). Jesus proclaims that he is the one who will bring God's transformation to a broken world. According to the prophet, God will bring about systemic transformations as an "everlasting covenant." Is it possible that the promises of God could produce a major transformation in the local faith community?

The Year of Jubilee

For decades, one of North America's favorite board games has been Monopoly. Players start out with the same amount of money. Through the toss of the dice, luck, and financial management, wealth is either accumulated or lost. The winner is determined by the bankruptcy of the other players. If a second game is desired, the players do not start where the previous game ended. The money, rather, is redistributed in equal amounts to the players, the property deeds are returned to the bank, and the game is started with a level playing field. The Year of Jubilee is very similar to the game of Monopoly.

The year of the Lord's favor described in Isaiah 61 is also called The Year of Jubilee. This special year, which happens every fifty years, received its name from the Hebrew word *yobel* (yo-BAIL), which means "ram's horn." The beginning of this special year was announced with the blowing of the shofar. The Year of Jubilee is first mentioned in Leviticus 25.

During the Year of Jubilee, land was to be returned to the family who originally owned it. Jews who had sold themselves into slavery, or been sold into slavery, were to be released. Debts between Jews were to be annulled, and the land was to lie fallow for the year.

The Jews were not the first to have this year of radical change. Previously, monarchs of the surrounding nations had declared similar actions on a whim. The unique element in the Jewish Year of Jubilee is that this was the first time such a change was codified into law. The Year of Jubilee was predicated on the understanding that the land belonged to Yahweh, the God of the Jews. People were merely aliens who occupied the land. In modern Christian jargon it would be said that people never owned the land, but rather were managers or stewards who cared for the land. In practice, the observance of the Year of Jubilee would have prevented debtors from falling more hopelessly in debt and an increasing amount of land controlled by a wealthy few.

