

Focus on Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

WHAT is important to know?

— From “*Exegetical Perspective*,” William P. Brown

The originating context of the lection comes from the aftermath of exile (586–538 BCE) and the historically modest beginning of Israel’s restoration in the land. God’s comfort of Zion is inextricably tied to Zion’s restoration. It is the comfort of new creation. And the result is so extraordinary that it must be described in lush botanical terms. Zion shall become the new garden of Eden, populated with “oaks of righteousness,” cultivated by God’s salvific work. The garden is nothing short of miraculous; it is the garden of God’s glory as well as the nursery of a nation. And how does God’s garden grow? Genuine restoration is cultivation in righteousness.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “*Theological Perspective*,” Scott Bader-Saye

Theologically, these verses from Isaiah center around the themes of salvation and mission. Isaiah challenges readers to name salvation as a quality of life here and now that reflects God’s desires for human community. Though we must be careful not to read Isaiah through the lens of the New Testament, a Christian reader cannot help but note the significance of Isaiah 61:1–2 as a description of Jesus’ mission in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 4:14–21). 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 brokenness; 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

The two questions of Advent always seem to be the same; “How is the advent of God trying to come into my life/our world?” and “What do I need to do to prepare for God’s advent?” Another way of asking the same questions is, “What do I need to change in order to allow God’s transformation to take place in me and ultimately the world?” What activities beside the hanging of the greens and singing of Christmas carols follow from the prophet’s words?