

## Witness in Word

## Isaiah 61:1-4

Listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah found in chapter 61, verses 1 through 4.

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.

### Same Old, Same Old? Or Something New?

Our Creator and re-creator, open us to hear your word brought to us in music, in scripture, and in teaching. May your Holy Spirit take the things we hear this morning and make them applicable and impactful to each of us individually and personally in whatever unique way each of us needs to receive your word. Amen.

*Christmas is over, and I have gotten fat.  
And in this joyous season, there's nothing wrong with that.  
Family and friends have come and gone, they gave my heart a lift.  
And now I'm left to wonder, what can I re-gift?*

Re-gifting. Leftovers.

Christmas is over. New Year's is yet to come. We are in that between week, gathered this morning for what I'm calling Leftover Sunday. The big celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, the Christ, is over. Mary and Joseph and the baby have come and gone. The angels have visited the shepherds. The wise men have escaped the clutches of Herod whose plot to massacre the innocents becomes lost as a subplot of the larger story of God made flesh.

And in our lives family and friends have come and gone, the gifts have been given and received, the meals have been cooked and eaten, the games have been watched, the Miracle on 34th Street has assured us that Santa is real, and Clarence has got his wings. We may find ourselves experiencing our own season of leftovers.

The things we have left undone. The things we never started. The loves we have not nurtured. The hurts we have not forgiven. The dragons we have not slain. The books we have not read. The poems we have not written. The songs we have not sung. The fears we have not released. The lives we have not embraced.

It becomes natural, during this season of leftovers, to consider what resolutions we might make for the coming year. A resolution, after all, gives voice to a desire to change. And perhaps the biggest change is to do in the coming year what has been left undone in the year just finished. Perhaps we will resolve to nurture our loves. Perhaps we will resolve to allow our hurts to heal and let forgiveness to begin. Perhaps we will resolve to tame our dragons if we cannot slay them. Perhaps we'll resolve to log off Facebook and open a real book. Perhaps we'll resolve to write that poem, that spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Perhaps we'll be bold and sing, whether in tune or out but with bold purpose, the song of our lives. Perhaps we'll resolve to set our fears free in order to embrace a new life not yet lived.

Or perhaps not.

My favorite Christmas movie of all time is The Lion In Winter, telling of a Christmas gathering in 1183 of King Henry II of England, his queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, their sons Richard, Geoffrey and John, and the French king Philip. One of my favorite lines is at the end, with Henry and Eleanor sitting in the dungeon after a week of family plotting and politicking and accusing and betraying – you know, everyone putting the fun in dysfunctional. Anyway, Eleanor looks around at the shadows and says, “We’re jungle creatures, Henry, and the dark is all around us. In the corners, you can see the eyes.” To which Henry replies, “And they can see ours.”

So many leftovers to choose from. Surely we can’t resolve all of them?

Henry says to Eleanor, “And they can see ours.” Meaning we can choose to look our leftovers in eyes and face them down. We can cower in the darkness or we can face the darkness. Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. Everything old has passed away. Indeed, everything has become new.” We can take our leftovers – those old things, the things we have left undone – and deal with them.

But there are so many leftovers to choose from. Surely we can’t resolve them all. Or can we?

Every week we read and hear these words which Jesus spoke, and which hearken back to the words we heard from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, anointing me to bring good news to the poor, sending me to proclaim release to the captives and receiving of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Jubilee.”

I want to challenge you to consider making one resolution. I want to challenge you to do the one thing that God asked his people to do on a regular basis. And that thing is to proclaim the year of the Jubilee. Leviticus chapter 25 tells us what the year of the Jubilee is. I’ll only skim over the concept this morning. We are familiar with the Sabbath day, that every seventh day is to be set aside as a day of rest. So too every seventh year was declared to be a Sabbath year, a year when the land would lie fallow and be allowed to rest. And the year following seven sets of Sabbath years, that is the fiftieth year, was declared to be the year of the Jubilee. Not only did the land lie fallow, but property was returned to its ancestral owners and any fellow Israelites who had fallen into hard times and had to sell themselves as bondservants were set free and permitted to return to their own land and property.

And Jesus comes into our world and proclaims the year of the Jubilee, a time of setting free, a time of returning people and land and property back to its original state. The year of the Jubilee is the year of the reset button. The year of the Jubilee is the ultimate alt-control-delete.

In this in-between week consider how the words of Jesus that we speak at the end of our service every Sunday are not about him, but about you. Do not think the pronoun “me” is about Jesus only. Instead, consider that the pronoun “me” is about you, the reader – the one speaking these words on Sunday morning.

You are a new creation. Everything old is done and finished and gone. Everything is made new. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you. God has anointed you to bring good news to the poor. God has sent you to proclaim release to the captives, be their captivity emotional or spiritual or physical or psychological. God has sent you to proclaim receiving of sight to the blind, whether they be blinded by prejudice or fear or ignorance or any other cataract upon the soul. God has sent you to set at liberty those who are oppressed by the prejudice or the fear or the ignorance or any other cataract of the soul of their oppressors. God has sent you to proclaim the year of the jubilee.

Let me take it one step further. God has sent you to set your own self at liberty. God has sent you to proclaim your own year of the Jubilee. To no longer cower in the darkness, fearing the jungle eyes that oppress you. To no longer be the old creature with its old habits and old thoughts and old imaginings and old dreams. God has sent you to proclaim good news to yourself. God has sent you to proclaim release to yourself. God has sent you to open your own eyes, to grant yourself clarity of vision. To stare down the darkness and to rise and to declare, "I am a new creation!"

Whatever your leftovers, know that they have been tossed, that everything old is done, that everything has been made new, that this is your year of the Jubilee.

At the Christmas Eve service, Pastor Chuck read a poem by Howard Thurman, an influential American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. Dean of chapel at Howard University and Boston University, and a mentor of Martin Luther King, Jr. He wrote,

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 flock,  
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 people,  
To make music in the heart.

To which Jesus might add, "To proclaim the year of the jubilee."

Amen.