

Text: Isaiah 61:1-3. Third Sunday after Epiphany.

January 27, 2019.

Good news is yours in the New Year and always. Amen.

Are things really new in the New Year? Did all the bills go away? No! I got all the bills for the Christmas presents. Feels like it will be next Christmas before I pay them off. Weather better? No! I wanted snow in December and it was warm. Now I don't want snow and well... Politics? Don't even go there. New party in power. Same gridlock. Same old news. Same bad news. Sorry to disappoint you, but it's the same, old news here today. Jesus lived. Jesus died. Jesus rose. But wait! That's good news! Yes! We have the same news today, from God. Good news! God didn't stop loving us when the calendar flipped. God will never stop loving us, no matter how many the bills, how bad the weather, how much worse the politics. We have the same news. Every year. Good News. Jesus loves us. Jesus died for us. New Year. Good News.

Look at who gives this good news. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord. The word Sovereign focuses on God's power. The word Lord focuses on God's unchanging love. That's good news, right? A powerful guy with unchanging love? That's good news in a new year.

This powerful Lord anointed his Son Jesus. Just to be clear, it's Jesus who is speaking here. So the me refers to Jesus. Actually, it would be better to use his title, Christ. The word Christ means anointed one. See that here? Maybe it's ok if you get a little Hebrew lesson. Hebrew was the language this book of Isaiah was originally written in. The Hebrew word of anointed is mashak. Mashak. Can you hear another word there? Messiah. Mashak. Messiah. Messiah also means anointed one. Anointing was a big deal. It wasn't like taking a shower in the morning. Anointing was reserved for very special offices, often offices that lasted for life. Offices that often were conferred directly by God or by his representative. Kings were anointed to rule and lead. For life. Prophets were anointed to speak for God. For life. Priests were anointed to offer sacrifices for sins and to represent God to his holy people. For life.

Look at what Christ, the Anointed, our Messiah, the anointed, was anointed to do. First off, right up front. Anointed to proclaim good news. Good news. New Year. Good News. Every year. Good News. Angels brought good news of great joy at the birth of Jesus. The Messiah was anointed to proclaim good news. Jesus is about good news. Our church is about proclaiming good news. We even have good news as our middle name. The official name of our congregation is Resurrection Evangelical Lutheran Church. Evangelical means good news.

But look for whom this news is good. The poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners. Yes, we could share literal and physical examples. But the focus on these words is spiritual. Jesus called blessed the poor in spirit. The poor are those who know they are spiritually poor on their own. The poor are those who are miserable on their own. And know it! The brokenhearted are those who are crushed by their sins. Broken by their guilt. The captives? Those trapped by sin. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin, a captive to Satan. Is that you? The prisoners are those in the darkness of a dungeon, who have lived in darkness so long, they can't even see anymore. Is that us?

We might feel like this isn't us. I'm not poor. I paid in cash for all my Christmas presents. I make my full Roth IRA contribution in January so it grows all year. But monetary wealth won't buy you spiritual riches. My friends, we are poor, miserable beggars because of sin! The brokenhearted? I've got a loving wife. My kids can stand to be in the same room with me. Most of the time. I'm doing pretty well, thank you.

That's the devil's lie, "Your heart is fine just the way it is. You don't need God to break it." Captives? We live in America! We are free! But one sin makes you a slave to sin and failing to see your sin makes you a worse slave to the worst lie of the devil, "You don't need God. You are fine on your own." Prisoners? Darkness? That's not me! I've never done anything that bad. Not like those people overpopulating prison. Another lie of the devil. "Thanks God, I'm good. I'm doing fine on my own." Here's the sad truth. If we think we aren't poor, we will never want God's riches. If we don't see our hearts broken by sin, we will never long for God's healing forgiveness. If we don't see we are captives, prisoners, we will never long for God's freedom.

But to the poor, there is good news. New year. Good news. Good news of great joy. Sorry I can't say that enough. The reason God anointed the Messiah was to proclaim good news! Good news! Jesus lived! You are holy! That's good news! Jesus died! You are forgiven! That's good news! Jesus rose! You will rise! That's good news! New year! Good news! Like a cast on a broken bone is God's good news to heart broken by sin. Throw that guilt on Jesus. Cast that care on Christ. He binds. He heals. He frees you from the slavery to sin. He releases you from darkness into light. That's good news! New year. Good news. New year. Good news. Proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. Now, this year of the Lord's favor was an amazing year, called the year of jubilee. You won't believe some of the stuff that happened in the year of jubilee. The year of jubilee happened every 50 years, so it was probably once in a lifetime. The year of jubilee was an entire year of vacation! An entire year of vacation! Can you imagine that? Makes the month sabbatical at Epic seem pretty lame. A year of vacation. And God promised so much abundance in the year before the Jubilee that people wouldn't have to work or plant or reap or harvest for the entire year. So there's a year of vacation! Can you imagine? A year of abundance! It was a year of cancelling debts. Wow! Think about that! Your credit card bills. Cancelled. Your \$30,000 in student debt. Cancelled. Not refinanced. Cancelled. Not lower interest rate. Cancelled. Mortgage on your farm? Cancelled. Land returned to its original owner. Slaves were freed.

What an awesome year! And each of those aspects had spiritual pictures. The year of vacation pictured spiritual and eternal vacation in heaven. The physical abundance pictured the perfect abundance of heaven. The cancelling of debt pictured the cancelling of our spiritual debt, our sins. The freedom of slaves pictured our spiritual freedom. Land returning to its owner reminded that there was an eternal home in heaven. What a cool year! What good news! One year. Good news. We get to have good news every year.

But then there's a contrast. A year of the Lord's favor. And the day of vengeance of our God. This seems out of place. There's all this good news and freedom and favor and comfort and why a day of vengeance? That's troubling. "My God doesn't take revenge. My God is loving." At least that's the popular opinion today. But if that's your God, that's not the God of the Bible. God takes revenge on his enemies, to protect God's friends. God punishes those who oppose him, to rescue those who believe in him. God has had enemies almost as long as the world has been around. Think about this. If there is no vengeance on God's enemies, then why bother being God's friend? If there is no accountability for being on God's bad side, why bother being on his good side? If there is no day of vengeance why bother believing in God, worshipping him? There's really no good news in being rescued if there's not really any bad news in being lost. If everyone goes to heaven, why bother believing in a Savior who saved us from hell? Why waste your time being in church, why bother being a Christian? Why bother having any God at all? You see, understanding the horrible nature of God's vengeance, burning fire, in hell, for all eternity,

makes us appreciate the wonderful nature of God's favor, resting in heaven, in the arms of Jesus, forever and ever. And lest you think this day of vengeance makes God a mean, old ogre, look at the contrast. We proclaim the *year* of the LORD's favor and the *day* of vengeance. A year is a lot longer than a day. God's favor is what he wants to give. God's vengeance is only his foreign work, his alien action. God only proclaims his anger, so his love is that much sweeter. We have that love this new year. That's good news. We have that love every year. That's good news.

Look at all these contrasts. A crown of beauty instead of ashes. Ashes were placed on the forehead to show sorrow. Instead of sorrow, God gives us a crown of beauty. The oil of joy instead of mourning. In heaven, with Jesus there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. A garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Jesus proclaims his perfection is a robe we wear to cover our sins, a robe that makes it impossible for God to see our offenses. Wow! There's good news.

And this good news lasts. They, we will be called oaks of righteousness. Oaks can be hundreds of years old. They are deeply rooted, immovable, seemingly eternal. That's how deeply God plants his love in us. Deeply rooted in his Word, immovable from his favor, eternal. There's actually an interesting contrast here. Oak trees or similar trees were often the location of pagan worship rituals. Even unbelievers long for the lasting, the eternal. But those rituals don't make righteous. In fact, no rituals make us righteous. Righteousness is a gift God gives. The status of being right with God is his gift. That gift is deeply rooted. God's word is immovable. God's favor is eternal. God's righteousness is lasting. There's good news.

Yes, my Christian friends, in this new year, there is good news. The Lord has bound up the brokenhearted. The Lord has proclaimed freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. All year there is good news. Every year there is good news. It's not just one year out of 50. It's every year we have rest in Jesus, an abundance of his forgiveness. Our sin is cancelled. Our guilt is gone. We are free. And for eternity we have good news. We have a Savior who rescued us from his vengeance and has planted us as oaks of righteousness. New year. Good news. All year. Good news. Every year. Good news. Eternity. Good news. Amen.