

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020 – THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

John 1:6-8, 19-28 (NRSV) The Testimony of John the Baptist

This week's song is the popular children's song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

*Advent and Christmas are a celebration of light coming into our very dark world.
In so many ways during this past year our whole world has been a very dark world.*

*Jesus is the light of the world, and the light of Jesus never stops shining.
It shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.*

*John the Baptist was not the light, just as we are not the light.
His job was to point people to the light, and that is our job as well.*

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8 - 11 (NRSV) The Good News of Deliverance

If last week's First Reading – from Isaiah 40 – was written by Second Isaiah, who lived in the mid-500's B. C. during and towards the end of the exile in Babylon, was this week's First Reading written by Third Isaiah – after 538 B. C. – after the exile in Babylon?

*How do these words from Isaiah bring Advent hope?
How do they bring light into the midst of darkness?*

Remember what we said on Christ the King Sunday (November 22) – this is the passage of Scripture which Jesus read, as recorded in Luke 4, when He returned to His hometown of Nazareth, visited the synagogue which He had gone to while He was growing up, was given a scroll to read from, selected this passage, and after reading it said that this passage has been fulfilled in Him.

*These are the first recorded words of the first recorded sermon of Jesus in the Bible.
It is also the only time in the Bible when Jesus was handed a Bible, selected a passage from the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) to read, and read it.*

They are like Jesus' Inaugural Address.

*How would these words – probably said to the Israelites after the exile – bring hope?
God cares about the oppressed, brokenhearted, captive, and prisoners (Isaiah 61)
The poor, captive, blind, and oppressed (when Jesus read from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4)
Those who need a fresh start – the year of the Lord's favor – Leviticus 25 – the year of Jubilee.*

¹ 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

² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

Psalm 126 (NRSV) A Harvest of Joy

How does this Psalm also speak to the time after the return from exile?

¹ When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

³ The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

When and how has the Lord restored your fortunes?

When have you been blessed so much that you wondered if you were dreaming?

When has the Lord especially done great things for you?

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (NRSV)

Which of the following do you find most difficult to do?

Which would you need an extra measure of God’s grace before you were able to do them?

What kind of extra measure of God’s grace especially would help make you able to do them?

¹⁶ Rejoice always.

¹⁷ Pray without ceasing,

¹⁸ Give thanks in all circumstances.

¹⁹⁻²⁰ Neither quench the Spirit nor despise the words of prophets.

²¹ Hold fast to what is good.

²² Abstain from every form of evil.