Advent 3 (A)| December 13, 2026

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126/Canticle 3/Canticle 15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

THE WORD | <10 MINS

Read aloud the whole passage at least once.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

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.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
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.
8 For I, the Lord, love justice,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
9 Their descendants shall be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge
that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.
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.

KEY TERMS |

- **Bridegroom:** Newlywed man or a man about to be married. Jesus is frequently called the "bridegroom" in relation to the church.

CONTEXT |

- The book of Isaiah is a collection or writings from three authors. Today's passage is part of the section often referred to as "Third Isaiah." Chapters 24-27 and 56-66 were written in Jerusalem after the return of the Israelites from exile.
- The people had expected a glorious restoration upon their return to Jerusalem, but instead were faced with many hardships. As a result, the writing in Third Isaiah is full of apocalyptic language and references to God destroying the temporal world.
- Isaiah is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament far more than any other book in the Hebrew scriptures apart from the book of Psalms. It has been a source of hope and inspiration of oppressed populations for millennia.

BIG PICTURE | <15 MINS

The people of Israel returned from exile with great hope for abundance, prosperity, and renewal. Instead, they faced unexpected adversity and pain. Isaiah envisions a God of justice and retribution who will restore the people of Israel … but not in the way they imagined. In these verses, the God of Israel is not a God of vengeance, dishing out retributive justice and pain to the enemies of God's chosen people. Instead, Isaiah describes a God of restorative justice, who is most concerned with lovingly and mercifully restoring Israel after a period of great suffering.

Throughout the passage, Isaiah's focus remains on Israel as the chosen people of God. The prophet reminds the people that they are anointed (v.1) and have an everlasting covenant with God (v.8). Israel's God has not, and will not, abandon them—even when the world seems incredibly hopeless and broken. Isaiah envisions a springlike renewal bursting from the ashes of their current, ruined community, and reminds Israel that God will be with them until its arrival.

- Describe God, according to Isaiah. What is God like? What does God value or favor? How does Isaiah believe God acts?
- What hopeful images resonate for you in this passage?
- What do you think is the role of a prophet? What is a prophet's responsibility to God and/or the people?

DEEPER MEANING | <15 MINS

We mee are so many memorable characters each Advent, from John the Baptist eating locusts (Matthew 3:4; Mark 1:6) to Mary's angelic visitor (Luke 1:26-38). Don't let Isaiah be lost among them!

Isaiah's world is not too far off from our own: Tyrants reign with seemingly unlimited power; suffering abounds; and the faithful people of God wonder how long they must endure this broken world. Isaiah, like readers today, lived in the anxious time of "already, but not yet."

For readers today, Christ has come and, through his death and resurrection, restored us to God in relationship. And yet, paradise has not yet been restored on earth. We still mourn, hurt, and cause pain to our world and to members of our communities.

Isaiah—like John the Baptist and other prophets throughout scripture—reminds the people of God that such brokenness is not the design of the world. God does not delight in pain, and will restore humanity to wholeness. And we are not forgotten or abandoned amid our suffering. God longs to restore us and make us whole. Until then, we the people of God have been anointed and called to provide a counter example of justice, love, and mercy. Even as we mourn the brokenness of this world, we are called to live lives of charity and hope, pointing past this suffering to the glory to come.

- How do you identify with the author's feelings of hopelessness or despair?
- Where do you see echoes of the world Isaiah describes in our world today?
- Who do you believe is or was a prophet? Which of their teaching stands out to you?
- How do you hear these verses from Isaiah this Advent, especially? Where do you find hope or freedom? What is the invitation?

INVITATION | <10 MINS

I hope that you find comfort in Isaiah's words, as so many members of the great cloud of witnesses have before you. This is a painful and difficult world to live in, especially when we hear of God's vision for our flourishing throughout scripture.

How are we to face the suffering and challenges of everyday life with anything but despair this Advent? Doesn't God hear us when we cry out? Does God delight in our pain?

To live a life of hope and joy is countercultural in today's world, much like in Isaiah's time. We are not called to turn away from the suffering of others or to fall into despair when we are faced with adversity. Instead, we are called to rejoice that God's grace and love abounds and live our lives in the hope of Christ's resurrection. And we are called to be sources of that abounding love to the world around us. This time of year, especially, we are invited to donate to local soup kitchens, shelters, and other places of need. Seek out the lonely. Comfort the broken-hearted.

And find comfort, in turn, knowing that God dwells with us in our darkest nights of the soul. We are not alone or forsaken. Loved by God, we are called to shine the light of Christ into the world.

- Who is suffering in your community? How can you help bring them hope?
- For what can you give God thanks today?
- Where is Christ's light shining in your world now?

CLOSING PRAYER | <5 MINS

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

– *Book of Common Prayer, p. 260*

"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."

– Isaiah 61: 11

ABOUT THE AUTHOR |

Lindsay Barrett-Adler serves as director of development at Forward Movement, sharing the ways generous donors broaden its ministry offerings. Before joining Forward Movement in 2021, Lindsay fundraised for churches, schools, and nonprofits in Philadelphia. She is married to Paul, an Episcopal priest, and lives outside of Chicago with their three children and stubborn Bernedoodle.

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