

Third Sunday of Advent

“THE ANOINTED ONE”

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

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Analysis by Michael Hoy

*1The spirit of the LORD 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;
2to 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.*

DIAGNOSIS: The Former Devastations

Step One: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Ruined

There is oppression. And with oppression comes all kinds of evils, most pointedly to the oppressed who experience them. Isaiah of the Restoration (Third Isaiah) can see “the former devastations” (v. 4) that have happened not just to the land but to the people of Israel, now returned from exile. These people, from all they have suffered, are defined by the prophet as imprisoned in every way imaginable (v. 1), of mourning and faint spirit (v. 3). Oppressors are not much better for the confusion and fear they help to create by alienating themselves from others. Oppression does this to people. It leaves them ruined.

Step Two: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Broken-Hearted

To be sure, there is broken-heartedness in oppression. But how so? With humility and recognition of the theological meaning of their exile? Or, like that of the oppressors, ignoring the oppression and/or excusing themselves from it? The oppressed, to be sure, cannot ignore the pain and suffering, but they can be

deeply tempted by vengeance and violence (cf. the psalm of the exile, Psalm 137:8-9). For one who understands their plight, this is understandable, but never encouraged. The real tragedy is that our hearts are broken with God. We become reduced to voicing our complaints, cynicism, and criticism. We only desire meanness and enmity toward the oppressed or oppressor—without humility, and without the salutary value of repentance. In our ruined and devastated environment, that broken-hearted, and broken, we become.

Step Three: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Wrongdoing*

When the prophet speaks of “the day of vengeance of God” (v. 2), he sees it as a day of salvation (35:4). More on that later. But for many of the prophets—as even Third Isaiah is aware—the day is terrifying. “I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing.” In all that has transpired in our oppressive reality, in our hearts now broken from God, what all has been robbed from God? What wrongdoing have we committed? And how will we, now, measure up to God’s justice? The answer is more than we can bear.

PROGNOSIS: Raising Up

Step Four: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Righteousness*

The answer we can bear, and hear, is the voice of the Anointed One. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...” (v. 1). This passage from Isaiah was the text of Jesus’ sermon at the inception of his ministry (Luke 4:18-19). This Anointed One came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to restore sight to the blind, to release the oppressed from dungeon and darkness, and to bring upon the day of the Lord’s favor. And in taking on the tree of his cross, he adds this blessing to all who look upon him in hope: “They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.” (v. 3). Here is the day of salvation that the prophet

could see coming!

Step Five: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Rejoicing*

And so also our hearts, planted as they are in this glory, give voice to our rejoicing, gladness, and praise. For we see how the devastation and ruination of our lives has been overcome at the cross. We are blessed before the nations (v. 9), bedecked with the finest of oils, garments, mantels, and jewels in righteousness (vv. 3, 10). “My whole being shall exult in my God.”

Step Six: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Repairing*

And so, in the face of oppression, we come not to lay more burdens on a people already deep in darkness, but to repair the ruined breaches, the devastated cities, the despairing peoples with this new-found hope. So much so that as the earth springs forth in joy and gardens begin to grow, the nations will wonder what joy this is (v. 11). Gaudete, indeed!