

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*December 13, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The early church viewed Isaiah as promising the coming of Jesus and quotes frequently from the text. When Jesus was asked to read in Nazareth, he read from this text (Luke 4:10). Starting in 59:16, the promised Redeemer will come to Zion wearing the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. The Spirit of the Lord will be upon this Redeemer and he shall be a light to the world (60:1). This text is then the speech of the Redeemer and the Light in response to the injustice mentioned in 59. It is against the iniquity described in 59 that this text should be read. This is not the iniquity of a wayward people or against leaders who have failed to follow the law. This iniquity is rooted in the sin of humanity which places all creation in the dark and hides the face of God (59:2). Only the light from God can dispel this darkness and restore justice. This is the work of the Redeemer.

Isaiah 61:1 "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me"

Have you ever felt in darkness at the lowest ebb? Is this the absence of the spirit?

Has there been a time when a peace, joy, or a sense of being loved washed over you?

When have you felt the "spirit of the Lord"?

If the Spirit comes through faith in Christ, can there be justice without Christ?

If we have the Spirit, do we heal, free, and proclaim joy through our lives?

## **Commentary on John 1:1–11, 17–18** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

While Mark simply says that Jesus is the son of God and Matthew with Luke examine the temporal human origins of Jesus, John places Jesus as the Alpha, the beginning. In this form, the essence of Jesus, the "logos" or Word is the active agent. If Christ refers to the risen Jesus and Jesus refers to the incarnation then the Word refers to the pre-incarnation of Jesus. John then connects the Word to creation through light and life which are corrupted by sin leading to darkness and death. In this sinful state, humanity can neither see nor recognize Jesus as the light and life. Therefore the light must be testified to by John. The law witnesses to the need for the light but John points to the light which shines forth as grace and truth. This grace and truth reveals the light and life of the Word which shows the Father's heart. As the incarnation, Jesus is the grace and truth of God. Jesus is the incarnate Word.

John 1:10 "the world did not know him."

Have you ever seen people who walk around with "closed" eyes even when there is a miracle right in front of them?

Have you ever experienced temporary blindness to God with you?

When have your eyes been "opened" to the presence of Jesus?

Have you ever tried to open someones eyes?

**Is it more effective to simply to witness to the light in your heart?**

## **Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Paul ends with this last encouragement live in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Since we are covered Christ's breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation (5:8), we are free to live a life of holiness (3:13) in the Spirit. The fruits of this life are joy, praise, and prayer. As the Spirit removes our old destructive patterns of evil through sanctification, we experience the peace of God. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit which affirms the words of the prophets and enables us to hold fast to what is good. It is the power of God in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit that will do this.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 "pray without ceasing"

Is prayer just a series of words or is it an attitude of the heart?

If our hearts are turned toward God shouldn't our lives reflect that direction?

Is the prayer of the heart actually the life we live?

If our whole life is a continuous act of prayer, is this what it means to pray without ceasing?

### Sermon "Shine the Light" (*Sermon Video*)

It is appropriate to read the first chapter of the Gospel of John during Hanukkah. Hanukkah, which means "dedication" is the Jewish festival that commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple of Jerusalem after the desecration of the Temple by a foreign army. The story goes that they found only enough oil to keep the menorah in the Temple lit for a single day but they needed eight days for new oil to be pressed and consecrated. The one container of oil finally ran out on the eighth day when the new oil was ready. Just as God kept the light going in the Temple against all odds, God sent the light of the world into our darkness so that the temples of our hearts could be consecrated (water baptism) and rededicated (baptism of the Holy Spirit).

John testified to the light as so many followers of Jesus have done over the centuries. From the great saints of the church to the parents and grandparents who have held out the light, the light of Jesus has not gone out despite persecution and plagues. As we prepare for Christmas, it is important to stop and remember all of those who have testified to the light in our lives. If they are still alive, let them know how they re-presented the light of Christ to you. In these dark times, we are now called to continue to testify to the light that is grace and truth. While no one has seen the face of God, Jesus reveals to all the heart of the Father (John 3:16). In a world of doubt, fear, and despair, we are called to testify to the faith, hope, and love found in the Word.

What blinds us and puts us in the dark, however, is sometimes our own traditions and expectations. As recorded in Luke 4, Jesus was invited to return home to teach at the synagogue. After all of the reports of miracles and teaching, how the members must have waited with anticipation to hear what Jesus had to say. Unrolling the scroll to the last place that was read, Jesus read Isaiah 61, "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". Closing the scroll, he said that the reading was fulfilled in their hearing. WHAT!?! This was not the teaching they were expecting but rather a proclamation by Jesus that he was the anointed. The light shown but they could not comprehend it and they tried to throw him from a cliff. Their traditions and expectations blinded them to the wonderful news that they were given.

It was only after the resurrection that those who followed Jesus truly understood what Jesus had said and who he really was. With this understanding, Jesus anointed them and us with the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) and calls all those who claim him as Lord to proclaim the good news. We testify to the light of the Christ when we bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. This is the light of hope and joy that comes through the Holy Spirit. A Spirit who causes our hearts to rejoice in the Lord, pray without ceasing, and give thanks to God. The Spirit shines the light of grace upon the deepest parts of our souls sanctifying us for the coming of Jesus. This light grows in us and shines out through our thoughts and actions. We become the lanterns in which the light of Jesus through the Holy Spirit continues to shine forth in a world of darkness. May we continue to testify to the light, proclaiming the goodness, and rejoicing in the wonders of our God.