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Lent Day 23: The Spirit

3-4 minutes

Isaiah 61:1-3 (ESV)

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion —
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.*

In the last of our Isaiah texts we end with a hope-giving passage about Spirit-led transformation. The Lord's anointed, who has been described in previous chapters as both a king and a servant, has come to announce good news for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives and the imprisoned. This anointed one is both a servant

who is filled with compassion for those in need and also a king who has the power to enact this transformation.

It's hard not to read this passage without a sense of yearning, joy and hope. Our hearts are drawn to the hope that our mourning can turn into beauty, gladness, praise, righteousness and glory. Our lives are far different from the world of the exiled Jews, yet this passage speaks into the deep recesses of our disillusioned hearts. We resonate with the sense that we too are impoverished, brokenhearted, alienated and trapped by prisons of our own making. We are searching for something or someone who can rescue us from the predicaments in which we often find ourselves because life is beyond our ability to control with our intelligence, money or sheer willpower. Who is this anointed one who leads us to believe that we are not alone, abandoned to our own pathetic and impotent devices?

Of all the Old Testament passages that he could have used to begin his public ministry, Jesus reads from this Isaiah passage and concludes with the audacious declaration, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). As you consider the things that lead you to feel alone and powerless, remember that the hope of transformation presented in Isaiah has been accomplished, and Jesus is the long-awaited fulfillment of the yearnings of our hearts.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, you have accomplished through Christ, the anointed one, what I could never do in my own abilities. Yet, in the course of my day-to-day life I turn back to myself, instinctively putting my hope for change in almost everything but you. Help me to see more of the fullness of what Christ has accomplished so

that I might place my hope in him and experience the greater healing, freedom and comfort that he graciously gives. In Christ's Name, Amen.

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