

Central Lutheran Church

Narrative Lectionary Bible Study: December 9, 2020

Welcome and Introduction

We continue with this weekly “water stop” in our shared covid-19 marathon. Thank you for joining this study, it is so good to be together for holy conversation and to “see” one another on Zoom.

Schedule

This fall we have been in a journey through the Hebrew scriptures, the Old Testament as we often call it as Christians. Here in Advent we dwell in the prophets. Last week Joel, tonight Isaiah and next week we hear Mary’s prophetic song. Please note these dates and lessons:

Tonight, December 9 - Isaiah 61: 1-11 (Spirit of the Lord)

December 16 - Luke 1:26-45, 46-56 (Annunciation and Magnificat)

December 23 and 30 – NO Zoom Study, Christmas break

January 6 – Zoom Study Resumes

Narrative Study for Wednesday, December 9

Welcome and Christ Care Prayers

Second (and Third) Isaiah – Words of hope for every age

We arrive at the power shift. The people of Israel are freed. The exile is over, yet it will take years until the temple is rebuilt. Many of the exiles will never return, changing the shape of Judaism forever.

Our guide, Abraham Heschel, writes, “It was in this exciting period that the prophet arose who lifted the meaning of these events from the level of political history to the level of understanding world history as a drama of redemption.... The message of Second Isaiah, as [he] is conventionally called, is of no age. It is prophecy tempered with human tears, mixed with a joy that heals all scars, clearing a way of understanding the future in spite of the present. No words have ever gone further in offering comfort when the sick world cries.”

As we have pondered all fall, there is a constant theme of remembrance and a call for God to remember God’s promises. Heschel names this as true for Second

Isaiah, "Second Isaiah does not passively accept Zion's lot. Far from being silent, [he] challenges the Lord, putting the Lord in remembrance."

One more insight from Heschel can help shape our conversation tonight, he writes, "More excruciating than the experience of suffering is the agony of sensing no meaning in suffering, the inability to say, 'Thy rod and Thy staff, the comfort me.'" (All quotes from Heschel's The Prophets)

Suffering, loss, illness, worry, anxiety, longing, indeed all the ways we might define the absence of God, are complex and only bearable if we have a sense of God's promise in the experience of absence, in community and somehow, somehow, meaning in the midst of our deep loss. It is Second Isaiah who seeks to name the meaning, even in the midst of the deep suffering experienced by people in exile. It is a word spoken to those when exile ends, but the question lingers, "what next, what now?" For some, they do return to Jerusalem, but not in the numbers that were anticipated. The restoration in Jerusalem is not as planned, nor quick. There is a lot here to ponder for us in this pandemic exile, in the midst of an awakening about the work for racial justice and the healing needed in a divided nation. Is there a word of hope here for you in your exile, in the challenges and as you ask the "what next, what now?"

A quick word about Isaiah, Second, Third and a literary reading

A quick word about Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah, maybe a question, have you heard of Isaiah 40-66 being called Second Isaiah, and perhaps adding Third Isaiah as the author of Isaiah 55-66, in a previous study? Scholars today agree that there is one "Isaiah" voice in chapters 1-39, and a second "Isaiah" voice in 40-54 and most likely a third "Isaiah" voice in 55-66. How do we know this, in part it is because of history?

The year that King Uzziah died was most likely 742 B.C.E. This is the date of Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. We hear the prophet's call to the northern kingdom, which will fall in 722 B.C.E. We also hear Isaiah's call and presence, as with Jeremiah, at the fall of Jerusalem is 587 B.C.E. Then, Isaiah's words of comfort and hope as Cyrus of Persia comes to power and defeats the Babylonian empire in 539/515 B.C.E. You can see that one "voice" cannot speak over these 150-200 plus years, but a shared voice can express the "human tears, mixed with a joy that heals all scars, clearing a way of understanding the future in spite of the present."

There is also another reading to note, a more recent development since Heschel and the other brilliant scholars who heard these three, distinct "voices" of Isaiah.

That reading is a literary reading, please note, not literal reading. It is about poetry, language and style. In this reading Isaiah's "voices" are in two movements, the first in Isaiah 1-33, which is a gathering of the warnings of judgment and the promise of restoration for Jerusalem, Judah and the nations. The second "voice" is then in Isaiah 34-66, which speaks to the fact that judgment has already taken place (722/587 B.C.E.) and restoration is at hand.

The gift of this scholarship is that you can follow the path that personally makes the most sense.

Lost in the night... waiting in hope

Advent's theme is "Lost in the night... waiting in hope." Hope is both a place we dwell, a contemplative home place and the tug of God for action, for concrete work. Both are needed: contemplation and action. Here in Isaiah 61 we hear both invitations, in remarkable ways. As we pause for *Lectio Divina*, be open to how God tugs at you in each of the readings: intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Where do you hear "home," the place to dwell and be renewed in hope? Where do you hear God's call, commission for action and the work for justice that leads to peace?

Tonight's Lesson: Isaiah 61

Lectio Divina

Quick reminder, if you would like to enter into the "lectio divina," or divine reading at home, is to pause to read the lesson three times. You can read the lesson silently, or even out loud if you are in a quiet place. There are many ways to engage in *lectio divina*, here is one way to consider:

1. The first time we read the lesson for the information, the story that is being shared. Here we read with our head, asking what we first noticed?
2. The second time, we slow down and read with our heart. What emotions do you notice as you read and respond or react to in the lesson?
3. The third and final time, really slow down. Perhaps you pause or stop at a verse, linger there. Here you begin to read with your soul. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling?

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;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to 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.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins,
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.
⁵Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks,
foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;
⁶but you shall be called priests of the LORD,
you shall be named ministers of our God;
you shall enjoy the wealth of the nations,
and in their riches you shall glory.
⁷Because their shame was double,
and dishonor was proclaimed as their lot,
therefore they shall possess a double portion;
everlasting joy shall be theirs.
⁸For 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.
⁹Their 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.
¹⁰I 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.

¹¹For 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.

Conversation and Questions from the Divine Reading

1. What did you notice? What was interesting, or confusing? What was familiar or unfamiliar?
2. What emotions did you notice as you read? How did you respond or react to the lesson?
3. What is God saying in, with and under this story? What is God not saying, in other words, is God speaking or does it seem more like human interpretation at this point. What is liberating or what is troubling? How are you open to God as you pause for this third reading?
4. What questions do you bring tonight for us to discuss?

A reflection on hope, from Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen's teaching from With Open Hands, page 73:

“When we live with hope, we do not get tangled up with concerns for how our wishes will be fulfilled. So, too, our prayers are not directed toward the gift but toward the One who gives it. Ultimately, it is not a question of having a wish come true but of expressing an unlimited faith in the giver of all good things... Hope is based on the premise that the other gives only what is good. Hope includes an openness by which you wait for the promise to come through, even though you never know when, where, or how this might happen.”