12-27-20

Sermon on Isaiah 61:10 & 11

1. Introduction
2. We are at the end of one year and on the cusp of a new one. This is a good time for hope and optimism.
3. The brief passage we’re looking at today has a clear look forward to the coming of Messiah, and what the world will look like then.
4. Prayer
5. The text
6. (v. 10) I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; [In case you didn’t recognize it, this is one of those couplets that state the same idea in two ways to emphasize the point.]
7. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
8. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness
9. As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland
10. And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels [The image here is a magnificent wedding, where both bride and groom prepare themselves for the beauty that is to come.]
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.
12. What shall we take away from this lovely little text this morning?

I think many of you will agree with me when I say that, a year ago, I didn’t have any idea what was going to hit me. 2020 has been quite a year! What are some of the hard things that have happened?

Well, we found that it wouldn’t be possible to support a second pastoral position on the staff of The Holy Way, and so, with deep sadness, we said goodbye to Pastor Elizabeth.

We experienced what must be the most divisive and ugly presidential elections in modern history, with the drama and bitterness carrying far after election day.

We experienced the deaths of several dear saints in our congregation.

Ahmaud Arbery was killed by three white men in Brunswick, GA, Breonna Taylor was killed by police in Louisville, KY, and George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis. These and other deaths of African-Americans brought about a long-delayed and much needed national reckoning on racism and systematic injustice in the US.

And then Covid! Oh my goodness, Covid! I really believed in January of 2020 that we’d be worshipping together in our sanctuary for the next fifty-two Sundays. Little did I know. I’m pretty sure that I had never heard of Zoom at that time.

And on and on and on it goes. And yet. And yet, we are loved by God. And yet we have been created into a family, the family of The Holy Way, a family that loves one another and serves the needy and keeps moving forward.

God has, in Jesus the Christ, clothed us in garments of salvation and covered us with a robe of righteousness. What possible response can we have but to join in with the prophet Isaiah greatly rejoicing in the Lord, exulting our God in our whole being? We can spiritually dress ourselves as for a wedding, and eagerly anticipate the shoots God is already preparing to bring up among us.

And, because of these truths, we look toward this new year, not with fear or apprehension, but with confidence. We don’t know everything that will happen, and in fac, we can hardly predict anything that will come our way. We do know, however, that God has committed, covenanted to never leave us or forsake us. Anything that happens, good or bad, will happen with God walking with us, closer than breathing. And so we welcome 2021.

We’re eagerly, but not anxiously, waiting to learn who your next pastor will be and when she or he will begin serving you. We’re faithfully planning to continue our work identifying and challenging racist systems in our community. We stand ready to provide food to those who are hungry and clothing to those who are in need. We will reach out to our brothers and sisters as they are struggling, calling and writing and sharing our love. You will do that in the new year because that is exactly who you are, who God has created you to be.

My prayer, for myself and for you, is that we will see this turning of the year as a time of refreshment and renewal. May we renew our commitment to prayer and to the study of the Scriptures. May we renew our commitment to love our neighbors, those in this congregation and those throughout the community and the world. May we stand with the marginalized and the hopeless. May we know in new and beautiful ways the love God showers upon us. May it be so. Amen