



"Yes, the Lord has done great things for us,  
and we are overjoyed."

*PSALM 126:3*

# Order of Worship

December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Third Week of Advent

## Welcome & Announcements

Opening Prayer (either join in the liturgy or take time for silence)

In this season of waiting, of longing, of looking for you to come into our world.

We are seeking light.

In our own lives. **We are seeking light**

In our neighborhoods. **We are seeking light**

In our families. **We are seeking light**

In our work. **We are seeking light**

In Grace. **We are seeking light**

In our nation. **We are seeking light**

In our world. **We are seeking light**

Seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened, ask and it will be given to you

**Jesus Christ you are the light of the world may we have eyes to see you and ears to hear you come into our world today. Amen.**

Opening Hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem" UMH 230

Scripture Readings Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; 1 Thessalonians 16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28  
By Andrine Haas

Gloria Patri UMH 70

Sermon "Loving the Present Moment"

Special Music: "Holy, Holy, Holy" UMH 64

Blessing of Our Offerings by UMC Discipleship  
Doxology UMH 94

Joys & Concerns (Response: Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.)

Silent Prayers

Pastoral Prayer of Confession by Rev Gord Worship Offerings

Prayer of Assurance

Lord's Prayer (Said together)

Closing Hymn "Go Tell It on the Mountain" UMH 251

Benediction by Sara Miles in *A Hunger Beyond Food*

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Hope

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-11

December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### Loving the Present Moment

Last week we discussed hope and through our embodiment of hope, we shared Holy Communion together virtually. We looked at the opening chapter in Mark for reference to our theme of hope as John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah. This week our focus shifts to the theme of Love in our third week of Advent. We will focus on the Old Testament lesson this week from Isaiah 61:1-11.

As we have talked about peace and hope, love is a process that takes time to bloom and grow. Love is built off of relationships. Love is at the core of our season of Advent as the Messiah represents this idea of unconditional love as we share the story of the Gospel. Love starts off with a sacrifice from both mother and father as they flee for their lives to protect the child they love. As the hymn goes, "Love shall be our token; love be yours and love be mine; love to God and all neighbors, love for plea and gift and sign" (*UMH 242 Love Came Down at Christmas*).

Our lesson in Isaiah 61 is important for many reasons. This chapter resonates with many of the events we are experiencing currently, albeit these events are entirely unrelated. This is also the heart of the gospel as Jesus would use many of the same ideals throughout his ministry. Isaiah 61 gives us a message of redemption, reconciliation, liberation, and a new sense of being in the world. It certainly creates a space of hope in my heart as I read the prolific words of this chapter, so let's look at the chapter's message together.

The first section of Isaiah 61, verses 1-4, expresses the prophetic voice of God. The opening verse proclaims this, "The Lord God's spirit is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me" (Isaiah 61:1a CEB). The verse continues on by speaking to the core of the gospel by bringing the good news to the poor, releasing captives, liberating the prisoners, and binding together the broken-hearted (Isaiah 61:1b). Verse two references the year of Jubilee as a turning point in the history of the Israelites, but what is the year of Jubilee?

Without going into an immense amount of detail about the year of Jubilee, the full description of this celebratory year can be found in Leviticus 25, but the essence of this celebratory year surrounded reconciliation and restoration of the land and the people. The Day of Reconciliation, where people's sins were released into the wilderness, carried a different meaning during the year of Jubilee since this entire year reflected on forgiveness and repentance. The year of Jubilee is where many debts and binding contracts were nullified as well. It was a year to restore families and peoples in order to sustain themselves as a community and as individuals. This is important because the Israelites are looking to return to their holy city of Jerusalem as they are returning home from Assyrian captivity.

Verses 5-9 help us understand a new relationship, a new covenant, and a new way of seeing the world. It describes a world where people will not be financially bound to their worth. Their joys and celebrations will not come from their wealth or their prestige, but their joy will come from their values and God's love for justice to be carried out in their lives (Isaiah 61:7-8). Verse nine reminds us of God's covenant with Abraham. "Their offspring will be known among the nations, and their descendants among the peoples. All who see them will recognize that they are a people blessed by the Lord" (Isaiah 61:9 CEB). This section of the chapter reminds us God celebrates with us as we take part in our reconciliation with one another. God is a part of our process because of our relationship with God, and as we are reminded, this covenant endures forever as God will not abandon us. If this is all true, then reconciliation and repentance are a part of the process of Love.

Finally, in verses 10 & 11, the scriptures speak to a joy and love we will have in our righteousness as we grow in our relationship with God and all of creation. These were all important themes for the Israelites because they are returning from Babylonian captivity. The Book of Isaiah is actually three books combined. The first book, chapters 1-39, warn the Israelites of the Assyrian Empire's power and to stop allying themselves with the Assyrian and ally with God instead. The Israelites choose the Assyrian Empire and are taken into captivity after the Assyrians defeat the Israelites on the battlefield. The Israelites hope for return in exile, which are chapters 40-55, as they mourn for the loss of their Temple, holy city, and way of life. Chapters 56-66 are Third Isaiah and is where the Israelites are able to return from captivity to their home. The Israelites have been away from their home for decades and they have lost some of their traditions because of this disconnect from one another and their land. As we face Covid-19 and

the closure of our in-person gatherings, we can certainly relate to the Israelites in some ways being away from our sacred space.

We will return to our place of worship only to feel different and be different as this year has shaped and molded us into something new. Our traditions will be celebrated in different ways and feel differently as we weren't able to celebrate many of those calendar events this year. We feel this disconnect right now as I speak, but just like the Israelites were reminded of God's sacred presence, we are reminded this season of Advent of God's presence with us. In a couple weeks, the wait will be over when Love will come down and be humbly born in a manger. Love will remind us of not just our connectedness to God, but Love will remind us it is meant to be spread throughout the world.

As this year approaches its end and as we continue the season of Advent, let us see love in a new way as our relationship with God and each other has certainly changed throughout this time. Let us continue to love one another by keeping each other safe by minimizing our contact with one another, wearing masks, and socially distancing. Let us learn to love each other as we continue to dream of a better world and work to make that world possible by our community outreach. Let us see the love we have for each other whether it be a friendly call, a prayer lifted up, or a caring card. Let us be practice love and nonviolence with our enemies so we can break the cycles of hatred, greed, and corruption together.

At minimum, may we remember to dream wonderful dreams filled with peace, hope, and love because we can still dream as we await our return to our sacred place of worship. As we anxiously await our return to in-person gatherings and Christ's birth, may we not lose sight of the reason we celebrate Christmas, which is to spread love through our world. May you each be blessed and feel the loving Spirit of Jesus Christ this season. May the Divine bless you and keep you in the days to come.