

Sermon: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

Text: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 (v.1): The Year of the LORD's Favor

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."*

Theme: God's Anointed One Ministry

Goal: The Messiah (Christ) was sent by God to offer God's favour to us.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What do you expect from a Saviour? Or, as some people say: *Why do I need a Saviour? I'm not lost...* Those people don't realize that they are living in darkness. When you think about Jesus, what are your expectations?

Several wrong and false concepts about the Messiah had been developed by the people of Israel before Jesus came. Therefore He was not accepted by the majority and was not accepted even by the established church. In spite of the many prophecies, - like this one from our text – due to political situation they were expecting a warrior, a Messiah, a king that would lead them to victory in a war against their enemies to give them political freedom again.

We cannot just spiritualize the role of the Messiah or just materialize our hope. Jesus came to establish His spiritual Kingdom, but He came also to help us in our daily life and needs, as His ministry during the

three years showed: He healed the sick, He stood beside the oppressed, He had a word of comfort to those in distress.

Jesus used the text from Isaiah 61 when He preached for the very first time in the synagogue of His home town Nazareth. At the beginning of His sermon He said, after reading the text: “Today this Scriptures is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The prophecy presents the role of the Messiah and the goal of His ministry in very clear words: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to... to... to...and to...” The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus when He was baptized to indicate the beginning of His public ministry. “Anointed” is the English word for the Hebrew word “Messiah”, or in Greek, “Christ”. Let’s go through the several tasks given to the Anointed One of the Lord and see how He presented and still presents God’s favour to His people.

I – To preach Good News

“The Lord has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor.” Jesus’ ministry was not restricted to the temple or to the synagogue. He preached the Good News of God’s favour in the streets and on the mountain, in the villages and on the shore of the lake, reaching everyone, poor and rich, men and women, even children – and this was something very new for all. When people and even the disciples became excited about His miracles, He said to them: “Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come” (Mark 1:38). Jesus knew that the miracles He was performing were just for the moment; but His messages of Good News would endure forever in the hearts and lives of the people and of the future generations. And the Good News Jesus was preaching are the same as the angels announced in Bethlehem and that are echoing till now at Christmas: “I bring you good news of great joy

that will be for all people. Today a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ, the Lord!" (Luke 2:10, 11).

II – To bind up the broken-hearted

"The Lord has anointed me to... bind up the broken-hearted." How many times has your heart been broken? Frustrations, deceptions, lack of hope, a severe sickness or death in family... No one can bind the pieces of our heart together but Jesus. Even when His mother had her heart broken under the cross, Jesus had a word of love and comfort for her (John 19:25-27). And when Mary Magdalene was crying outside the tomb, the resurrected Jesus appeared to her and restored her broken heart and her hope! (John 20:10-18).

III – To preach freedom

"The Lord has anointed me to... preach freedom for the captive and release from darkness for the prisoners." He is not talking about criminals in jail. He is talking about those in darkness held in captivity by their sins. He said to the paralytic: "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). He released the adulteress woman saying to her: "I do not condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11).

These words are still valid for us when we confess our sins at the beginning of each Service and we hear the pastor say: ...in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins...because we have His promise after His resurrection: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven" (John 20:22, 23).

IV – To proclaim the year of God's favour

"The Lord has anointed me to... proclaim the year of God's favour." We are living in the period between the first coming of Jesus and His second coming. This is a special time of God's grace and favour. The opportunity for people to believe and to be forgiven is still at the door. We have religion freedom and the Gospel has been preached

regularly not just among us but all around the world. This is the year of God's favour. A time might come when this will not be that easy anymore. We cannot despise the year of God's favour. I wrote a short message in the last Newsletter about the parable of the unfruitful fig tree (Luke 13:6-9): *Thank God we have a "gardener" who intercedes for us: "Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it." Jesus is always ready to stretch His hand on our behalf. First of all, we are planted in God's vineyard, His Kingdom, since our Baptism. By God's grace, we are able to live under His protection and care. Jesus enables us to live our faith according to God's will and to produce fruits. Over all, He forgives our failures and encourages us each day. But we cannot be stubborn and reject His care and help. The natural way of a tree is to produce fruit; the natural way of a Christian is to produce good deeds.* (St. Thomas Newsletter November-December 2014).

V – To comfort all who mourn

"The Lord has anointed me to...comfort all who mourn." Jesus said to Jairus when he lost his daughter: "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Luke 8:50); and Jesus brought the girl back to life. – Jesus said to the widow of Nain who had lost her only son: "Don't cry" (Luke 7:13); and brought her son back to life. - Jesus said to Mary and Martha when they lost their brother Lazarus: "Your brother will rise again...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:23, 25, 26). Christians cry when we lose one of our beloved ones; but we have hope and believe in the eternal life. Jesus comforts those who mourn, pointing to His resurrection.

Conclusion: These are just some of the tasks of the Messiah, accomplished in the ministry of Jesus when He was with His disciples and through His church and ministers till now. Jesus is among us and develops His gracious tasks as the Anointed of the Lord, the Messiah,

through His Word and the Sacraments. When we listen to Him and believe; when we approach the Holy Table repentant and in faith, and receive His body and blood under bread and wine: Jesus is ministering to us with His Good News, binding our broken hearts, giving us freedom from our sins, proclaiming the year of God's favour, and comforting us. Do not let false expectations about Jesus and all the stuff that surround Christmas' celebration rob us of the true reason why our Saviour came and the true joy He gives us through His Gospel and the Holy Communion. Jesus is among us offering His gifts. Just believe - and enjoy His blessings. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 14 December 2014