

**June 15, 2008**  
**Pentecost 5**  
**Father's Day**

*"Oaks of Righteousness"*

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### **ISAIAH 61:1-3**

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**T**he Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, <sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

How beautiful it is to drive through the Santa Ynez Valley during this month of June. The hot summer sun has turned the green grass of the California hills into a bright golden color, giving our state its name of "The Golden State." Interspersed on the golden hills are the majestic coastal live oak trees with their bright green leaves. In Genesis 2:9 we are told that that the Lord gave us trees that are pleasing to the sight and good for food. These live oak trees are an example of a tree that is very pleasing to the sight.

In the words just read to you, we hear Jesus our Messiah, the anointed one, speaks to Christians of every age including the ordinary humble people sitting here this morning in this worship service. He calls us oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. God's people enjoyed the beautiful oak trees that stood on the hills and valleys of the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as we have beautiful oak trees on the California hills and valleys or the oak trees we enjoyed along the river on the family farm in southern Wisconsin. The Lord uses this picture of oak trees to tell us how special we are to him. First, he changes our lives by his love and then he gives us purpose in our lives as we live each day to glorify him where ever he has planted us. It has been said that the two greatest needs in life are to be loved and to be useful. As we look more closely at how the Bible calls us "oaks of righteousness" it is my prayer that you will appreciate how much you are loved and how important your lives are as "oaks of righteousness."

#### **Loved**

A pastor once asked his new youth confirmation class, "What is our greatest need in life?" There was a long wait. No one offered an answer, until a new boy blurted out, "To be loved." He was from a broken home and did not know from day to day whether he would be living with his mom, or dad or grandmother. We would agree this boy from a broken home. Our greatest need in life is to be loved by our family, our spouses, our congregation, and above all by our God. Listen now to how Jesus speaks through Isaiah and tells us how much he loves and cares about us. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor."

We are very familiar with these poor people. How often don't we fall asleep at night confessing how poor we are as we look back at the sins and weakness of the past day. We confess how poor we are when we gather to worship with such words as, "Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed You in my thoughts, words, and actions."

Jesus comes to poor people like us and proclaims good news. The book of Mark tells us Jesus began his ministry by preaching the good news of the kingdom. The good news of the kingdom of God! Think of your King coming to you. See him lay before you the greatest treasure the world has ever seen. It is not a treasure chest of gold and silver, or valuable stocks or bonds. It is the treasure of being loved by God with an intense, personal, never changing, always loyal and ever faithful love. It is "Goodness and mercy will follow us not *some* of the days of our lives, but all the days of our lives. The King of kings and Lord of lords freely offers this treasure of being loved by giving his life for us. Wounds on his back, nails in his hands, crushed for our sin, stricken, smitten and afflicted by the Father, Jesus paid for every sin that separates us from our God and puts us in a position of being loved forever. Paul was not exaggerating or overstating the case when he said of this good news, this greatest treasure in the world, "Nothing else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When this good news of his love comes into your life huge changes come to you personally. "He binds up the broken hearted." In fact he not only binds up the broken hearted, he binds up the half-hearted. He binds up the hearts of people who have lost some of their confidence in these last days, with declining church attendances and poor responses to our best evangelism efforts. His unfailing love restores the flagging zeal and leads us to say once again with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes."

This Messiah, this Jesus, this Yishua, this Deliverer, this Savior, this King is so powerful he can bring freedom to the captives. "To proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Every 50 years God's Old Testament people celebrated the year of jubilee when debts were forgiven and slaves were allowed to go free, and land was restored to the people who had lost their family inheritance. Imagine for a moment the shame of losing the family inheritance, going into debt, and then selling yourself as an indentured servant just to have enough food to support your family. How did it ever happen? Maybe it was it was a job that was lost, or crops that failed, or bad health, or bad management of finances. You know the poor guy is in deep trouble when he sports on the back of his large pick up truck a bumper sticker that reads, "What's wrong with paying off my credit card with another credit card?"

It happens even to the best of us. I am not talking about mismanagement of funds, but of precious time for the kingdom of God, especially in this information of computers, multiple channels on the big screen television, video games and access to information. What happened to the valuable time in prayer, the time in the Word, and the time to be with people? To us the Messiah comes, our deliverer, and he announces to us the debts have been paid, the prisoner doors are open, the year of jubilee is upon us. Can you be sure that all your personal debts were paid? Listen to your Messiah as he cries from the cross, "It is finished." Look at the nail marks he left in his hands as he says to his beloved disciples who had locked themselves behind closed doors, "Peace to you!" The

disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord because the gross mismanagement and unfaithfulness of their lives was completely forgiven just it has been for you. Now we are free to live again for our risen Lord and serve him in his kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.

So majestic, so careful and so loving is our Savior that he is able to take people who are in the deepest depths of mourning and despair and turn their sorrow into gladness with his intense personal love. He comes "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 gladness instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

Let me introduce you to a man whose life was changed from ashes of despair to the beauty of unbridled joy. He was one of the wealthiest men in the world. His life was washed in love from his wife and from his ten children. He used his vast wealth to help people in need. Where ever he went people stopped talking and even the little boys stopped playing to say with hushed breath, "There goes Job." Then it was all taken away from him. At first he was able to praise the Lord with these familiar words, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away blessed be the name of the Lord." Then came the questioning from his friends and then from within himself, "Why has God done this to me if he loves me?" So low did this man sink that he says of the God who loved him, "He has stripped me of his honor and removed the crown from my head." He accuses the Lord of alienating his friends and making his breath offensive to his own wife. So deep was the pit of despair that Job cries out in anger, "Have pity on me, my friend, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me."

There in that darkest pit of despair the love of God was deeper. For you see there is no pit so deep that Christ is not deeper. The man of despair suddenly bursts forth from that dark prison and shouts, "Oh that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead or engraved in the rock forever!" What were these shouting words? Were they words of even more bitterness and anger? Oh, my friends you know them, you know them well. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has destroyed my body, yet in my flesh I will see God." How could this man's life suddenly take such a sudden turn for the better? That's what Jesus does for us. He flips the switch in the room filled with darkness and changes our lives with his love. He bestows the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

## **Useful**

Dear Christians, you have come to know this love and you have come to see with Job how useful your life is. "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor." Look at the oak trees growing on the golden hills of California. No landscape architect can plant these trees in such magnificent locations with such beauty. The risen Lord and Savior who loves you with unfailing love now sits in glory at the right hand of the heavenly Father. From this position of power he strategically micromanages your life so that you can bloom where he has planted you. The psalmist David was not exaggerating when he said, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

The Lord has brought you to this point of your life to be oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord, a display of his splendor. Everything you do reflects the righteousness that is yours in Christ. Later in this chapter Isaiah leads us in a glorious confession of faith, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Because he has rooted you in his righteousness, he allows you to be useful for him when you go about the daily affairs of your life, greeting your wife in the morning and planting a love tree with her in your marriage, interacting with your children and planting a love tree in their lives, waving to your neighbor as you pick up the morning paper, showing kindness to the person checking out your groceries when they are having a bad day. It was Martin Luther who calls our attention to so vividly to how our calling in life is linked intrinsically to our standing in life, rooted in the righteousness of Christ. Oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord, a display of his splendor, it does not get any better than this. You know how much you are loved and how useful your life is. Amen.