

December 17, 2023 – Third Sunday of Advent

## **The Build-Up**

[Isaiah 61:1-4](#)

*“They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.” – Isaiah 61:4*

Hope is a powerful force. Hope gives us strength to survive, to cope, to seek peace, and to dream of glorious times even amidst loss, travail, and destruction.

By the time the last chapters of Isaiah were written, the people who heard it read to them were down and out. After all kinds of misfortune, many had given up hope.

At this special time, the message of hope again becomes personal. “The Lord has anointed me,” the author says. He promises liberty, freedom, comfort – even “the day of vengeance of our God.”

Those who have been steadfast, “those who mourn in Zion,” will be strengthened. They will trade in their vestments of pain and their vessels of penitence. In return they will receive garlands, and gladness, and a mantle of praise.

What a great message of hope. For those who have known the depths of loss and separation, be it financial or societal or emotional, it’s a wonderful feeling of liberation to know that there is a God who cares for them – and, importantly, that there are people who believe in, and act upon, this calling to “bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted...”

We have the green light to make it right for those who mourn. They will have their pride renewed so that they will be like “oaks of righteousness,” displaying the Lord’s glory. They will take their energizing hope and they will restore and repair their devastated cities, and lives, into something new and glorious.

This message of hope, of newness, resonated with people in the time of Christ’s birth. It’s little wonder that the verses of Isaiah 61 have been paired up with the Christmas story through the 21 centuries since.

As we build up to Christmas Day, may we remember the power of hope, and the need to empower all the world through the message of Christ’s birth and redemption for us.

***Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us share with others the hope of your world-changing love. Help us remember its power to heal and to restore and to repair the brokenness in our world. Amen.*

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