

**Scripture Reading: Isaiah 61**

**“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, 3 To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.” 4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, They shall raise up the former desolations, And they shall repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. 5 Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, And the sons of the foreigner Shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. 6 But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, They shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, And in their glory you shall boast. 7 Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, And instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; Everlasting joy shall be theirs. 8 “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering; I will direct their work in truth, And will make with them an everlasting covenant. 9 Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, And their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, That they are the posterity whom the Lord has blessed.” 10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”**

## **"Serving 'til the End of Time"**

**We come this week to the end of ordinary or normal time in the Church calendar & thus we come to the final message of my five regarding Covenant Renewal Worship and the great doctrines of the Reformation. Remember the five elements of worship:**

- **A Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **A Confession of our sins & forgiveness**
- **A time of Consecration of the Saints**
- **A Communion meal with our Savior**
- **A Commission to disciple the nations**

**This week we consider how and why we are commissioned: A portion of the service that gets little attention these days, but one that I would argue could be seen as the most important.**

- **To see the importance of our commissioning it is important to step back and consider the big picture:**
- **The whole purpose of the New Covenant is given in the Great Commission, which is why we end our service with our commissioning and a blessing from God!**

**When I review our commissioning,**

**I try to use a passage as the text which reflects the growth of God's Kingdom!**

**In years past, we have studied the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Daniel where we are told that the stone cut without hands, Jesus, will crush the Empires of Satan and then fill the earth with His Kingdom. We have looked at the passages in I Corinthians & Hebrews that confirm this work and even the 19<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Revelation where Jesus rides forth with His Saints to conquer the earth.**

- This morning I chose a familiar passage from Isaiah which should remind us that all of these pictures are given to describe the period of history where God has placed us!

We should know this because it was this very passage of Scripture that Jesus chose to read and interpret when He began His earthly ministry!

Luke 4: “16 So [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” 20 Then [Jesus] closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

- One of the things that is often forgotten about the impact of the reformation today is how it birthed some of the most influential & effective missionary efforts since the early church.

Ian Murray in his book the Puritan Hope argues, as I would today, that their confidence grew out of recapturing those great doctrines of Grace that we have studied this year.

- They understood that it was God Who was growing His Kingdom and that they could serve Him well in that work!

Much of this work of the Reformation has been largely set aside by the Scofield Bible notes & the popularity of the pre-millennial dispensational view of end times, especially here in America.

By moving the hope of the Kingdom into the future after a secret return of Jesus for His Church, they have shifted the Church from having a focus on filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, to one of just saving a few brands from the fire before everything goes to hell in a handbasket.

- That is very difficult to square with all those images of a growing Kingdom, unless one argues that they do not apply to us today!

On the other hand, how do we square a belief in the growth of the Kingdom in the way those passages describe it when we see SO many problems in the world and even within most churches, including our own! Remember just a few weeks ago how we considered the image that the Apostle Paul gives us about the Church growing up into the perfect man Christ Jesus, united around one faith, one baptism and one God? I made the point then that we had to believe that this is where the Church is headed in history and remember that it was the Holy Spirit’s job to accomplish that seemingly impossible task.

- It is much the same when it comes to believing that the Spirit of God is filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

We considered this theme at length in our hundreds of lessons from the Gospel according to Luke and the Book of Acts. But both of these concepts can still be overwhelming unless we step back and ask a pretty simple question:

- How does one walk a mile?

Yes, you simply take one step at a time!

- How does God fill the earth with the Kingdom of His Beloved Son?

He does so with one faithful obedience at a time! Now, reflect on that for just a moment: One single step does not go a mile, BUT each step is an important part of walking that mile.

**Each of our faithful steps does not fill the earth with God's Kingdom:**

- **But at the end of history when the Spirit has completed His work and the Son presents that finished work to the Father, we will see and know that each obedience by one of the Saints was an essential part of that completed work!**
- **At bottom, this is why the commissioning at the end of our service is so important!**

**So as with the Advent season, the commissioning portion of our service is both the end and the beginning... It is the proper end of our Covenant Renewal Worship service...AND it is the beginning of our new week of service in the Kingdom of Jesus.**

- **We have gathered together in response to God's call.**
- **We have remembered that we belong to Jesus, wearing His white robes of righteousness!**
- **We have matured in our faith as we have been instructed by God's Word and brought forth our worship, gifts and prayers.**
- **We have been given food and drink indeed as we partook of the body and blood of Jesus at His Table**
- **And finally, God desires to bless us with abundant fruit in the work of His Kingdom: Those good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in day by day as His Kingdom advances.**

**Our Covenant God has a plan and a purpose for us experiencing such renewal during the worship service!**

- **Through it we are properly prepared to serve His purposes!**

**I mentioned last week that there would be some carry-over with regard to how the celebration of the Lord's Table should impact our daily lives and witness to the world. So my discussion of practical applications this week will focus on that portion of our worship. Of course, we should remember that each portion of our worship should impact our lives in practical ways:**

- **Being called to worship by God each week should remind us that we are the call-out ones and keep us from the distractions of the world.**
- **Our time of confession and forgiveness should make us a contented people who are forgiving to those around us: We are those who know the solution to the guilt that haunts the human race.**
- **As those who have been consecrated and instructed by God's Word, we can be wise in all we do in our lives, our families, our workplaces and here at Church.**
- **Bringing gifts and prayers reminds us that ALL that we have comes from God and that we must depend on Him moment by moment each day of our lives obeying the command to pray without ceasing.**

**And then we come to the Lord's Table:**

- **We must see that Lord's Table is the meal which gives meaning to all of the other meals that we share with one another.**

**If we have gone the way of much of our busy world and forgotten the importance of meals & fellowship; may we repent and remember how important they are to us and any children that God may have put under our care... We need to remember and instruct them about the basics of food:**

**We are commanded to petition God, "give us this day our daily bread!"**

**I commented during this season of Thanks giving that we should think about Who we are thankful to more than what we are thankful for. It is sad in our age of abundance that we often have to ponder just what it is that we can be thankful for and seldom mention where they came from!**

**There is mystery here at the Table as we considered last week, but it should simply remind us about the mystery of how God provides our daily food: Pastor Tuuri, who helped us plant this church, would often give thanks for the dead things that give us life and this is a great lesson for our children: We should discuss with them how any food just left on the plate or even in the refrigerator long enough will simply rot...**

- **And yet when eaten that food miraculously give us life!**
- **This is why food and drink are an important part of our lives and why we see them take such a prominent place in all of the Scriptures!**

**We must remember and teach that family meals or fellowship meals are a time where we see good food & drink encourage and enrich good discussions and relationships.**

- **And where we see good relationships and beautiful tables encourage and enhance the enjoyment of food & drink!**

**You can argue that the entire creation was a banquet table set out before Adam and Eve to enjoy when we read that God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."**

**In our families, food and mealtime should always have the prominent place which they deserve. This cannot become another form of legalism, but it must be a priority none the less. [tell the story of my radio show]**

**There are not only lessons about food and drink to teach our children, but also invaluable teaching opportunities... Whether it is Dad or Mom teaching the little ones simple Bible lessons as part of the daily routine at meal times, to those heavier discussions around those same tables with older children coming home to discuss interactions they had with people in the work place or school.**

- **Our fellowship and hospitality around food & drink is an area where the world should clearly see that we are different! [neighborhood reputations!]**

**We should always be ready and willing to share what we have been blessed with, but we must not ever be ashamed of the blessings and abundance that God brings into our lives! So yes, what we do here on Sunday at the Table should work itself out in all of our lives each and every week! And as I mentioned, the same is true with all aspects of our worship which I hope and pray will be a part of many continuing conversations in the weeks and months ahead. Let me conclude with just a few quick comments about how we finish the commissioning portion of our service each week: Just as we always begin with the same song of adoration with O Worship the King, we end our service with the singing of Simeon's Song & the Doxology. While many of the songs that we sing in the service are far too difficult for our younger members, we provide various places where they can heartily sing along...**

- **Parents you should be diligent in making sure that they know these songs AND that they participate.**

**Simeon's song is a fitting way to end our covenant renewal service:**

- **God had promised Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah...**

**We are to be prepared to go forth and serve Jesus with the same faith that Simeon had believing that this tiny baby would bring such momentous changes to a very needy world as God's Messiah.**

**With our hands once again lifted up, we proclaim with Simeon's faith... "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever more shall be, world without end, AMEN.**

- **We join with the Saints who have gone before and the hosts of heaven in declaring the glory of God with the New Song believing that God has a plan and purpose for all of history!**

As we approach the season of Advent, it is important that we understand all this, so let me ask the children to help us a little here with some review:

- What was established when Jesus came? That's right a Kingdom!
- How big will this Kingdom become? That's right it will fill the whole earth.
- From, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" to go and disciple the nations, God wants the earth filled with righteous people!

To accomplish this, Jesus came to save His people from their sins with His death on the cross, He was raised in power and ascended to God's right hand as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The Spirit was sent at Pentecost to comfort and empower us as the Body of Christ as we carry out the Great Commission that our Lord gave us:

**Matthew 28:19** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

- What a promise and what a commission!

So we are left with two important questions:

- Do we believe Isaiah's prophecies to be certain & sure and that the Great Commission actually calls upon the Church to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus?
- IF we do believe this, then what is our role?

I trust I have made the case from the Scriptures that the answer to the first question is a resounding YES! So, how do we know what our role in God's great plan is going to be?

- Humanly speaking, the great commission is a tall order, but we don't start by planning who we should run for President!
- We will not need lots and lots of millionaires to make sure we can pay for the work of the Kingdom.
- We do not need to teach everyone in the world English so they can understand God's great plans!

While we may chuckle at such proposals, the sad truth is that as the Church has wrestled with these truths down through the centuries she has often fallen into such traps, failed miserably and then begun to wonder about whether filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus is really God's plan just because our human efforts failed.

**We are to remember and believe the great promises of God and then we are to simply be those who trust & obey.**

And again, how does God fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus?

He does so with one faithful obedience at a time! Each of those faithful steps alone does not fill the earth with God's Kingdom:

- But at the end of history we will see and know that each obedience by one of God's Saints was an essential part of that completed work!
- At bottom, this is why the commissioning at the end of our service is so important!
- We are to believe that God really is taking history where He wants it to go, that the earth will be filled with the Kingdom of His Son and that He has a role for us to play in the advancement of that Kingdom!

**This morning I asked that our song of response be the hymn we sang at the Table last week so we could again ponder the attitude that we should have not only at this Table, but as we are commissioned and sent forth:**

**Isaac Watts, who gave us Joy to the World as the most optimistic Christmas hymn that we sing wrote these powerful words:**

**“Pity the nations O our God,  
Constrain the earth to come;  
Send Thy victorious Word abroad, and bring the strangers home.  
We long to see Thy churches full,  
that all the chosen race,  
may with one voice and heart and soul, sing Thy redeeming Grace!”**

**Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55**

**““Ho! Everyone who thirsts,  
Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat.  
Yes, come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.  
3 Incline your ear, and come to Me.  
Hear, and your soul shall live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you— The sure mercies of David.”**