

Gaudete Sunday

By God's Grace may I speak in the name of the God who was and is and is to come. Amen.

Today is Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is a Latin word and means "re-joyce". Advent in the church is a rather sombre season, where we are called to prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ by voices like that of John the Baptist, calling us to repent from the ways in which we fall short of loving God and our neighbours and to seek and do justice. But on the third Sunday in Advent, we are to rejoice. Gaudete Sunday is to remind us, that despite the doom and gloom that often comes with our bible readings before and during Advent, the heart of the gospel is full of hope and goodness. We have reason to rejoice.

So where do we find reasons to rejoice? Well, today's reading from Isaiah is a good reminder, that God's promises are for justice, for healing and liberation. And these good promises God has kept and will keep. That's the reason why we can rejoice today. At the beginning of his public ministry Jesus, as a Jewish Rabbi, read these words from Isaiah within the worship of his home synagogue. He then told the people present, that these promises of God were now being fulfilled, indicating that he is the fulfilment of God's promises. The people hearing this thought he was too full of himself, but what is recorded of his ministry in the gospels, shows that it turned out to be true. God fulfilled the promises for justice, for healing and liberation in Jesus Christ.

But injustice, suffering and oppression are nonetheless still real in our world today. Yet God continues to speak these promises and to fulfil them through Christ. And when Christ comes again, they will be completely fulfilled. That is why in Advent we keep being reminded that Christ has come, but that we are also still waiting for Christ to come again, to finish the work of God that he started. So how might God's promises for justice, healing and liberation speak into our world today?

he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,

That makes me think of the increasing hate and scapegoating that for example asylum seekers or LGBTQ+ people face by politicians, in the media and in their daily lives. Scapegoating minorities and vulnerable groups is an easy way out from honestly facing up to complex challenges and problems. It is easier to dehumanise people on the margins, than to challenge the greed and abuses of power by the rich and powerful. But God always stands with the oppressed, relentlessly affirming how precious and beloved each and every human being is.

to bind up the broken-hearted,

We all have our own heartbreaks, for some it's the falling apart of an important relationship, for some it's being made to feel like we are never good enough, or our hopes for the future being destroyed. To us God has sent Jesus Christ, to bind up our broken hearts and tenderly care for us, as we heal.

**to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;**

This makes me think of women and girls, whose liberties are restricted and taken away, who are sometimes literally made captives for no other reason than them being female. I think of the women and girls in places like Sudan and Afghanistan and I think of women and girls here and all over the world who suffer domestic abuse and violence. God sent Jesus Christ to bring liberty to them and release them from the rooms in which they are held captive. Jesus let Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, learn at his feet, equal to his male students. God decided that the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection should be women, helping us to begin to undo damaging inequalities.

**to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion-
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.**

Every day people all over the world experience the loss of loved ones, through accidents, illnesses or violence. The pain of never again being able to have a conversation, of not experiencing the future with a loved one, can be all consuming and leaves us broken and feeling like we cannot go on another day. But Jesus overcame death on the cross and was raised to new life. So in our mourning, Jesus is with us, knowing the pain and loneliness of death, comforting us by being with us in the pain. And reminding us, that death does not have the final word, but the eternal life of God does.

**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.

Over the past years we have seen so much ruin and devastation, through wars, as well as through floods and wildfires, caused by climate change. Wars have been raging on, some already for generations. The devastation caused by climate change is the result of the greed of many past and present generations. Yet God promises rebuilding and repair, to bless the work of people rebuilding destroyed homes and the planting of trees for reforestation.

God's promises are for justice, for healing and liberation. And these good promises God has kept and will keep. So we have reason to rejoice, because there is good news for us. Christ has come and will come again, bringing justice, healing and liberation for all of creation. So today, let us rejoice and give thanks.
Amen.