

Worship Materials for December 27

Isaiah 61:10- 62:3

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult 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 a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

⁶²For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. ²The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. ³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Please join in reading or singing ...

Go Tell It On the Mountain

African-American Spiritual

Published in *Chalice Hymnal*, page 167

Refrain

Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born.

1. While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night.
 behold throughout the heavens there shown a holy light.

Refrain

2. The shepherds feared and trembled, when lo! above the earth,
 rang out the angel chorus that hailed the Savior's birth.

Refrain

3. Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born,
 and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.

Now What??

Rev. Dr. Beth Dobyns
 Isaiah 61:10-62:3
 First Christian Church, Murray, KY
 December 27, 2020

We have been waiting and waiting this year, for something to change for the better, right? We have been preparing and hoping and getting weary with the waiting.

Just think back a few weeks up until today....about some of the things you have been waiting to see:

- Well.....Christmas!
- The election is over
- The first doses of the Covid-19 vaccine have been given, and millions more on the way
- The end of this wretched year is near
- And many more things you have experienced

And so it is that we who call ourselves Christians have come to believe, even now, in the one born in Bethlehem, the one foretold by prophets. We know that there is always a time to begin again, to usher out the old year and welcome the new one. And so perhaps, more than any time before us, we stand ready with big brooms and a dose of energy for sweeping out the dust of a difficult time in our collective and personal lives.

There is a little tune/jingle that reminds us that time is always ongoing. I will not subject you to my singing (!) but it goes like this:

There once was a man named Michael Finnegan,
 He had whiskers on his chin again.
 Along came the wind and blew them in again,
 Poor old Michael Finnegan! Begin again!

Sort of a nod to just pick up and get moving again....such is life. I think that may be where we are today, two days after Christmas. Keep on keeping on! A new year, fresh from all the imprints of this year will roll into view this next week. And it does our hearts and souls good to check in with scripture as we look toward

fresh beginnings. The Old Testament lesson today is from Isaiah, and it brings us a great good word!

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for God has clothed me with the garments of salvation, God has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

(v.10) And that’s just the beginning! The prophet helps us to remember that God’s love and care brings us to a new place along life’s path. God has done so much for all people of all time, and now we are the ones who will witness what comes ahead.

It is certainly understandable if we don’t quite feel like a party at this point in our lives. So much illness and death around us...But God remains, and God guides and provides a way for us. Let us not lose heart! Isaiah leads us to be bold in our claiming the love of God and the presence of that love in the Messiah. That Messiah has come to us, and reigns within us just as God has promised.

I read a lot of books, and a great many detective novels along the way. You may do this as well...when you find an author you enjoy, you attempt to read everything they have written. I did this with William Kent Krueger, who has written a number of novels featuring his Minnesota-based guy, Cork O’Connor. However, I read his novel, *Ordinary Grace*, and found it to be a completely different book, and one that grabbed my attention. It was about a community that experienced several deaths over the course of a short time one year. The pastor of the community had to preside at the funerals, and by the time he got to the funeral for a young girl, he was on the edge of sorrow and hope. Part of the funeral message included this word:

“When we feel abandoned, alone, and lost, what’s left to us? What do I have, what do you have, what do any of us have left except the overpowering temptation to rail against God and to blame him for the dark night into which He’s led us, to blame Him for our misery, to blame him and cry out against him for not caring?”

“What’s left to us when that which we love most has been taken? I will tell you what’s left...three profound blessings. St. Paul tells us exactly what they are: faith, hope, and love....Even in the darkest night it’s still within our power to hold to faith. WE can still embrace hope. And although we may ourselves feel unloved we can still stand steadfast in our love for others and for God.

“God gave us these gifts and he does not take them back. It is we who choose to discard them. “In your dark night, I urge you to hold to your faith, to

embrace hope, and to bear your love before you like a burning candle, for I promise that it will light your way.” Rock-solid is his belief in the reality of those gifts.

It’s all about the light, isn’t it? It is about the light and the power of the prophet who shows us that rejoicing can show us the way to remembering that we are God’s own.

Even in the loss and fearfulness that is all around us this year, we know that God will never abandon us, but will be ever-present with us.

It’s all about the light....from the stable in Bethlehem, that has drawn us there for so many centuries. It’s about the light of God’s love, shining in the star that has been the guide for us and will be forever. God has shown us that the world, in all its wild turns and twists, will follow the path from seeds planted to plants flowering, from doubt to righteousness and hope.

It is about the light of the word of God among us. So long as we remember that faith, hope, and love dwell with us, we know that the light of God’s love grows and abounds. We don’t have to worry what comes next....we know that if we can let the light of love burn within us, we will find the way. When we are tempted to say, “NOW what?” may we also be remembering that God’s love, through prophets, through the witnesses at the stable, through all the days of our lives, that we are able to join with Isaiah in proclaiming, “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake, I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch.”

It is about that light, that truth, that music in the heart, and the love that always comes from our God. Praise be to God, for light, for faith and hope, and for love. Surely these will guide us into a new page of life in this new year. May we be steadfast in following the invitations extended to us! Amen.

Notes:

(1) Isaiah 62:10-Isaiah 62:3

(2) Ordinary Grace. William Kent Krueger. Atria Books, 2014.

Prayer: O God of light and love, of creation and sustaining love, we bless your name this day! You have given the gift of your Child so that we might understand how to live boldly and kindly in this world. In this year that seems to be so troubled and uncertain, help us to awaken once more to your amazing love and care in our lives. We know that whatever comes our way you will never leave us. Grant us grace and clear direction as we enter into the gates of another year, seeking to follow your guidance, for we know that you indeed guide and provide. In all things, in all ways, we are your grateful people. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.