

**You shall be ...** (Isaiah 61:1-6; Luk 4: 14-21)

\* Beloved of the Lord, as lucky people we are blessed with good weather in January, and as the disciples of Jesus Christ we are blessed with eternal salvation; on the other hand, we are short of blessing as a result of growing not our church in number. I noticed that the Epiphany brightness benefits us as we follow in Christ's footsteps; and again, it affects us positively if we go forward in the fresh air. But contrary to that the drop in hope for our church to receive new members make us unhappy. Finally, can we say that in sum we have nothing to go? Dear Friends, many of you are veterans in Christianity, and it indicates that you are mature in faith and knowledge; and, if it is so, you have a good chance for better outcome working a miracle by faith. Today you will be assigned to the work of God!!! Someone may ask, *and what is that work?* "This is the work of God, said Jesus, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (Joh 6:29); and the eyes of all the congregation were fixed on him, (Lk 4:20).

\* In addition to the present pessimistic outlook for St. Luke's future, I would be a life-threatening fault to not have hope and to not believe the prophecy in Is.61 as it speaks regarding the accomplishment of a bright future for our church. In order to substitute our negative feelings with hope for the better, let's ask the Lord for spiritual enlightenment. Gracious God, how great You are!, and how great the works of Your hands! We thank You for the encouragement and consolation You send to us today from the prophet Isaiah as it was addressed to the Church of Christ in general, and as it was addressed to our church specifically. Dear Lord, we ask You for true faith that rests on your Word unconditionally. O gracious God, grant us the Holy Spirit, so that our faith may not be dead and unfruitful; but that it may be a living faith. Help us to hear Your Word attentively and live in accordance with it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, ever Son of the Father Almighty. Amen.

\* Before starting out on a journey down the path of knowledge and understanding, we need to say word. As you remember from last Sunday, I said that (Is. 62) can be viewed as the message of encouragement and consolation given to a spiritual community in distress. Imagine that a certain community stayed in distress as a result of its gradually declining in number; although it was accepted by majority that it happened because of transgressions, (Neh 1:6). Thanks be to God, finally the shameful degradation has come to an end, (Is. 62: 11). This thankfulness might be seen with the postexilic community in the time of Ezra or with a certain Christian community within the NT era. Then I said that St. Luke's can be qualified as a local Christian community to whom (Is 62) addresses the Word. This statement is believable because on one hand our church faces the same threat of desolation, and it needs to be renewed as it was in the time of Ezra; on the other hand, God's passionate love is active to keep our church alive and to renew it if we follow Jesus' words. Significantly, the same pattern can be seen from (Is 61), the OT reading for today. This

prophecy continues to unfold the important details regarding the restoration of our church. Now, after recalling the significance of (Is. 62), we are ready to start a journey across (Is. 61:1-6), step by step.

\* If we look at this passage in the light of the NT revelation, we understand that the spokesman is the Messiah himself, who is Christ, (Lk.4:18, 21); and second, his listeners are the royal priesthood from whom the Messiah builds up his Church, (Is. 51:7; 61:6; 1Pe 2:9). Jesus Christ has brought forth joy in the hearts of believers as soon as they received and believed the message, *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound,* (Is.21:1; Lk.4:18). From this proclamation of the Lord, we conclude that he himself is a number one missionary; no prophet, evangelist, pastor or bishop can take the bondage of sin from the prisoners - only Jesus, our God, has authority to do it. He is also the maker of righteous people; after a glorious transformation, people of his own may be called *oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD,* so that he may be glorified. , (v. 3).

\* The next matter of importance we found in syntax, it indicates that the acts of proclamation, liberation, and restoration shown in the Future Tense. Significantly these actions took their starting point after Jesus' baptism; as Matthew says, *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,"* (4:17). In fact, the time of proclamation called by Isaiah as *the acceptable year of the Lord,* had not been done in one year, according the Law of Moses, (Lev 25:9-18), or during the 3.5 years of Jesus' ministering on earth; but it keeps going on today and tomorrow as the apostles started Christ's mission after the Day of Pentecost. To them Jesus had entrusted the teaching and the means of grace, *And behold, he said, I am with you always, to the end of the age,* (Mt 28:20).

\* The next (vv. 4-6), unfold the events in connection with the restoration of our community. Several important things have already been done, meanwhile some of them are still needed to be accepted by faith. These things will be accomplished to the point of full restoration when St. Luke's will reach its golden age, when all the pews at the Sundays services are taken. Now is the time to take a step to move from an abstract conception to the specific.

\* The (v.4) declares, ***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.*** Please notice that the personal pronoun 'They' can also be applied to the people of our church. In addition to that, the word *repair* is used in the sense of renewal and vice versa, (Chron.15:8; 24:4). Truly our church has already moved from the condition of frustration. She now engages in strong activity by *building up*

*and repairing the ancient ruins* such as rebuilding the old roofs in the parsonage and garage, replacing the old furnace in the parsonage and repairing another one for the church, repairing some doors, and posting boards of information, and so forth. Significantly, Isaiah's reference to the building up and repairing are not merely about rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, or St. Luke's in Elizabeth, rather it is about the building up of the community from the ravages sin had made throughout its history. How do you know this, you may ask? Friends, before coming to this conclusion I looked through my commentaries. In one accord they speak my mind; for the language is hardly applicable to be a literal; the semantic relation between *the devastations of many generations* and *the ancient ruins* points towards remote things and a moral corruption of many nations.

\* Let's see what (v.5) says. *Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.* In a literal sense it would mean that foreigners take the whole labor of attending Jewish flocks and cultivating the Holy land. But at the spiritual level, flocks stand for churches; and why not for St. Luke's? And the churches will be shepherded by pastors from other countries; and why not from Russia? Next to that, the *foreigners* stand for new members; they will repopulate the devastated church, (Is.54:3), and why not St. Luke's?

\* The last verse from our text says, *And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.* In light of the NT revelation it means that the Church of Christ is the royal family where her members belong to the King Jesus Christ, whom they serve as priests, offering their body as living sacrifices, (Rom.12:1); and why not you and the new members? After joining St. Luke's "the foreigners" (the new members) will participate in your glory as the royal priesthood; and their commonwealth will be devoted to the Lord,(Hag 2:7).

\* At the end of the journey down the path of knowledge and understanding, I ask you to imagine Jesus in my place and yourselves as his listeners. From this pulpit Jesus has unfolded the prophecy from Isaiah 61. He told us what has already happened, and on top of it, he assigned us to the work of God. And what is that work? *This is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent,* (Joh 6:29).

\* Dear Friends, today you have been assigned to believe Isaiah's prophecy as it was interpreted relatively to your church. To believe means don't give up you hope, keep on the work of restoration, don't leave the community, and the Lord of Peace be with you always. O Lord, make the Epiphany season to shine brighter with new hope, deep understanding, thankfulness and patience. Amen.

Beloved, the grace of God be with you always.

Amen