

SERMON - THE 2ND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY - 4 JANUARY 2009
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

Isaiah 61:3 (KJV)

To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Jesus told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount ***Matthew 5:4 (KJV)*** *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

For they shall be comforted, for they shall be helped, as Isaiah says they shall have beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for grief, the garment of praise for the spirit of sadness, that they may be examples of righteousness to glorify God.

We hear so much bad news these days. The economy is in the tank. The wars continue with no apparent real end to them. The stock market continues to decline. Foreclosures are on the rise, on and on, there seems to be nothing but depressing information in the paper, on the radio and on television.

No wonder many of us are in the spirit of heaviness.

Add to that illness or injury and you have a slot machine effect of three lemons of downers.

And this is just the beginning, the beginning of a new year, the start of 2009.

My brothers and sisters, we can sit here today and wallow in all what is going on or we can look at what our Lord and others tell us in Holy Scripture.

First off, let's hear what Jesus tells us ***Matthew 6:25 (ESV)*** *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body,*

what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?
Matthew 6:31-34 (ESV) *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*
³⁴*"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

God will provide. God will provide for those who seek his kingdom. ³³*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

The Psalmist wrote so many years ago, **Psalm 37:25** *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

And again in **Psalm 34:9 and 10** *O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*

We so often get caught up in the material of life that we forget that all this that we are going through is transient, is just for a flash in the grand scheme of things, just a moment in eternity.

Jesus tells us to seek first the kingdom of heaven. There is a reason for that. If we keep focused on the big picture, we can keep what is going on around us in perspective.

Life will have its ups and its downs. We have to remember to not get too joyous when it is up and not to get too heartbroken when things go bad. Remember that life is a journey and the journey is all that it is about. In this journey we will have mountaintop experiences and we will have valleys. We cannot always stay on the mountaintop and we will eventually get through the valleys.

In these days, as in all history, there will be suffering. Even among us here there is no guarantee that all will go well with us all the time. But even then, God is still with us. God is still going to provide for us. It may what we get is the strength to get through, but in that case that will be what God decides we need.

Saint Peter wrote about suffering, *1 Peter 3:13-14 (ESV)* *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,*

And again in *1 Peter 3:17-18 (ESV)* *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,*

If we are seeking God's kingdom and if we seeking the righteousness of God, we will be like those that the Psalmist wrote about in *Psalms 27:1 (KJV)* *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

These are scary times. These are uncertain times. So it is even more important that we focus on God, not on the immediate, that we center ourselves firmly in the hands of God rather than on the material things of the world.

Remember the book of Ecclesiastes, there is a time for everything. *Eccles. 3:1-8 (KJV)*

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ²A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; ³A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to

cast away; ⁷*A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;* ⁸*A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

Perhaps this is a time for us to reflect, to reflect on how we have been living over these last few years. Perhaps it is a time for us to change how we have been living.

The author of Ecclesiastes also wrote *Eccles. 1:2 (KJV) Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*

Remember, all that is not from God... is vanity.

Amen.