

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Epiphany of our Lord
January 27, 2019
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
That'll be the day

—Isaiah 61:1-6

Dear Friends in Christ, is there a particular day that you are really looking forward to? Is it a vacation that you're planning this summer? Is there a destination on your bucket list that you are dying to check off? Do you have a certain goal that you are working and striving toward? Is there a particular day that you dream of and say with longing, "that'll be the day?" Or maybe we say that at times when our dreams are dashed or when ideas seem hopeless. If someone has let you down time and time again and they promise that this next time it's going to be different you think, "Yeah, that'll be the day!"

I imagine the day and the time that Isaiah prophesied was a day people in the latter half of the Old Testament longed for. I also imagine that for some it was a day that they were skeptical of. Isaiah prophesied, "***The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.***"

About a century after Isaiah prophesied, Jerusalem had been destroyed, the temple leveled to the ground, and some of its citizens carried off into exile in Babylon. Among some of those carried off into exile were people like Daniel (as in Daniel in the lions' den) and his contemporaries Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (the three men in the fiery furnace). I imagine that as they read the words of Isaiah's prophecy, or more likely recalled them from memory, they longed for the days of release and restoration that Isaiah foretold. But knowing Israel's track record, I'm sure that there were some who lost all hope because the outward glory of God's people had been destroyed before their eyes. When someone came preaching freedom and restoration and God's favor all they could think was, "Yeah, that'll be the day!" And yet there were others who had turned Isaiah's prophecy into some pie in the sky idea that the one Isaiah had foretold would come and effect political change, throw off the yoke of the oppressors and reestablish nothing more than earthly kingdom. They only had earthly things in mind.

I think we have fallen into each of those categories at times. There are times when we, with sincere faith, look at the present circumstances of this world and we fix our eyes on heaven. We long for Jesus to come and take us to be with him. What a day that will be! Although I'm sure that there are times when we become a little nearsighted and consider our present circumstances and any thought hope or comfort is met skepticism—"That'll be the day!" Does your heart feel broken and hopeless when you hear bad news whether it's about tragedy in the world or in your life? You dream of the day when things will be better, but that'll be the day. Is there a temptation or sin that imprisons you and now guilt is holding you captive? You long for the day when you can just be done with it and free, but there's a little devil that whispers, "yeah right! That'll be the day." Do you ever doubt God's favor and wonder where you stand with God? You just want peace. That'll be the day. Are you living with regret over past mistakes or lament over a really bad decision? You really want to shake it and turn over new leaf, but that'll be the day. Easily we can slip into a defeatist way of thinking.

Still other times we expect to find fulfillment in nothing more than what this world offers. In our own attempt to bind up our broken hearts we might search for a new possession or a new adventure. We think, "It's rough right now, but next month we'll be on the beach and troubles will melt away." But really the same problems will be there when you get back. To find greater fulfillment or to make up for past mistakes, we might set goals for our and when we reach that goal then, that'll be the day we'll finally feel accomplished or worthwhile, but that day never seems to come.

Our problem isn't that we have an unrealistic or pessimistic outlook on the future. Our problem is that sometimes we are only look off into the future for comfort. You can actually stop longing and waiting for the day when everything will be ok. You can stop the defeatist, skeptical way of thinking. You can stop daydreaming of brighter days and greener pastures. We can stop saying, "that'll the day" because *today* is the day. Today. Right now.

For God's people of the Old Testament, Isaiah's prophecy was a promise that was yet to be fulfilled. And the ultimate fulfillment wasn't found merely in release from physical captivity. One day Jesus made a visit to his hometown of Nazareth. As was his custom, he went to the synagogue. A scroll, which contained this very prophecy of Isaiah, was handed to him. He unrolled it and read, "***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.***" And

Jesus didn't roll up it say, "Wow. That'll be the day!" he said, "Today's the day!" he said, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

Today's the day! So often we set our sights on something yet to come, expecting it to finally bring fulfillment or peace or relief. But finally, our longing hearts and troubled souls do not find fulfillment in the next big adventure, or the next milestone in life. We find fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. If your heart has been broken by tragedy or disappointment, well today's the day—Jesus Christ has come **to bind up brokenhearted** with his gospel—take heart, your sins are forgiven. Take heart, Christ has overcome the world.

When you find yourself imprisoned by sin, and your conscience holds you captive with guilt, remember today's the day! Christ has come "**to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.**" Sin no longer holds you captive. Jesus came to cut you free from sin and its condemnation. The tyranny of guilt and shame has come to an end because in Christ God has declared you not guilty. This isn't a promise of something yet to come—it is a done deal. It is a present reality.

Whenever that fear enters your mind and you wonder, "Am I really good with God?" remember, today's the day. Jesus came **to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor**. That phrase refers to the Year of Jubilee in the Old Testament law. Every fiftieth year debts were to be canceled, indentured servants were released with no strings attached. Today's the day. Now is the time of God's favor. You rest secure in God's favor because Christ has paid your debt with his own blood. You live in the grace of God, not as an indentured servant but as his own dear child, no strings attached.

You look at your present circumstances and maybe it seems grim—you face mourning and despair and you long to be comforted. Well, today's the day. For Christ comes to comfort those who grieve and **to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair**. Christ bestows upon you his perfection, his victory over death, his Spirit to comfort you and strengthen you when you are weak. Today's the day!

If we only long for greater things to come, we miss the great things that God has already done. We also miss the great mission God has given us today. Look what Isaiah said of God's people. When the new day dawns and the Lord's anointed comes to preach good news, "**...you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God.**" Today's the day! Today God calls you his child through faith in Jesus Christ. He also calls every believer a priest. Today, in our churches we don't call the pastors "priests" because really every believer in Jesus Christ is called a priest. The Apostle Peter wrote, "**You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**" Today is a day to serve in God's kingdom. As a priest you have access to God. You can approach his throne of grace confident of his mercy and forgiveness because of Jesus Christ. You can pray to the almighty God as your Father. As a royal priest in God's church you offer him acts of service through the different roles he has given and they are acceptable to through Jesus Christ. As priests, you declare his praises, his greatness to those who are still held captive by their sin. You bind up broken hearts with witness to gospel. You proclaim comfort to those who mourn and despair. You declare pardon and peace to the guilty sinner in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today is the day. There still is a place in the Christian's life to long for days that are still to come. We confess that we are strangers here and heaven is our home. We long to be with Christ, which is better by far. We long for Christ to come and put an end once and for all to the evil of this world. That'll be day! But remember, today's the day! Today you stand in God's favor. Today you really are free from sin's condemnation. Today you are a new creation in Christ, holy in the eyes of the only one that matters. And today, you have the great and noble task of proclaim the same message that Jesus came to preach, that now is the time of God's favor. Today's the day.

Amen.