

Jesus Comes to Us As a Horticulturist of Sorts, to Change the Landscape of Our Lives and Hearts

"In today's Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 35, the prophet crafts some of the most beautiful poetry in all of the Scriptures," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. "He is describing impossible transformations, and as such the only adequate source for describing such transformations is poetry.

"The people to whom he writes are in exile," he continued. "They've been cut off from their homes, their land, their ways, for many years. And with each passing year of captivity, the prospects for returning home grow bleaker.

"To these weary and hopeless people, Isaiah says, 'Things will change. God is coming to you, and when God comes to you, some impossible transformations are going to occur.'

"First, the land will be transformed. The inhospitable and uninhabitable wilderness, the infertile wasteland, the desert itself will be transformed. The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will pour over the dry land. . . .

"This is a radical transformation, but Isaiah has another transformation in mind. Isaiah uses these powerful images to describe not only the radical transformation of the *land*, but also the transformation of God's exiled *people*. Isaiah sees God's exiled people as the 'dry land' that will bloom forth with praise for God. The impossible transformation that is to come applies not merely to the wasteland of Palestine, but to the greatest and most vast wasteland of all—the human heart! . . .

"I want you to think for just a moment right now about your life. Think about that part of your life right now that seems to be a wasteland. That place where you would love to see transformation, but where transformation seems impossible: that place that seems inhospitable and uninhabitable, that place and that situation where you wonder if even God can do anything about it.

"There was another person who felt similar to what you feel today. His name was John. He looked out over his vast wasteland from a prison cell, until he could finally take it no longer, and he sent someone to ask Jesus, 'Are you the One we've been looking for and hoping for, or should we look for someone else?' Can you (p. 2→)



"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel—'God is with us.'" (From O.T. for Sunday, 12/23) Therefore, in the words of the Collect, "Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your son Jesus Christ, as his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself."

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Sundays
10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service
11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation
11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion

**The Harbinger will not
publish next week.**

6:00 p.m.: This Sunday: Christmas caroling, party, program

Tonight, 6:30 p.m.: Final Advent Evening Prayers

12/24, 7:30 p.m.: Word & Table service (principal service of Christmas)

For the poor: Christmas needs: Hams, ready-to-serve rolls, butter or margarine, frozen pies, cake mixes, breakfast/brunch foods, eggs, muffins, pancake mix, sausage.

Readings, 12/23: Is. 7:10-17; Ps. 24:1-7; Rom. 1:1-7; Mt. 1:18-25. **12/24:** Is. 9:2-7; Ps. 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20. **12/30:** Is. 61:10—62:3; Ps. 147:13-21; Gal. 3:23—4:7; John 1:1-18.

Prayer Emphases: Luxembourg; Independent Bible Churches; Cathedral of St. James (Anglican), Toronto, and the Rev. Canon David Brinton; Christian Retreat Centers, incl. Maranatha Center, Boise; parishioners on York Street.

(Sermon, cont'd) transform the wasteland of my life, Jesus? And the response he receives back: "Go tell John what you see and hear. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life . . ." Jesus comes to us as a horticulturist of sorts. He comes to change the *landscape* of our lives and of our hearts. . . . and transform them with his grace and healing. If you look closely . . . you'll see where he has already done a great deal of healing and re-creating. . . . So . . . receive the grace he offers you."