

READINGS, COMMENTS, AND QUESTIONS FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2025
EPIPHANY'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, your Holy Spirit equips the church with a rich variety of gifts. Grant that we may use them to bear witness to Christ in lives that are built on faith and love. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your will, so that we may share with all your church in the joys of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

First Lesson: Isaiah 61:1-4

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.
⁴ 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.

- In this portion of Third Isaiah – written after the Exile– the prophet draws upon the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. The Year of Jubilee was to happen every 50 years. All debts were to be forgiven, and all slaves were to be freed. Isaiah 61 uses this Year of Jubilee to describe the return of Israel. The prophet expands the Jubilee from a one-year celebration to defining the corporate and national life together. As you read the description in Isaiah and in Leviticus, ask yourself what would the returned nation look like if they let the Year of Jubilee define it.

“You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.” (Leviticus 25:8-12)
- In Luke 4, Jesus reads aloud this description in the temple and claims that it is fulfilled in him. What does that mean for him? For us?

Psalm: Psalm 84

- ¹How dear to me | is your dwelling,
O | LORD of hosts!
- ²My soul has a desire and longing for the courts | of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh rejoice in the | living God.
- ³Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest where she may | lay her young,
by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my king | and my God.
- ⁴Happy are they who dwell | in your house!
They will always be | praising you.
- ⁵Happy are the people whose strength | is in you,
whose hearts are set on the | pilgrims' way.
- ⁶Those who go through the balsam valley will find it a | place of springs,
for the early rains have covered it with | pools of water.
- ⁷They will climb from | height to height,
and the God of gods will be | seen in Zion.
- ⁸LORD God of hosts, | hear my prayer;
give ear, O | God of Jacob.
- ⁹Behold our defend- | er, O God;
and look upon the face of | your anointed.
- ¹⁰For one day in your courts is better than a | thousand elsewhere.
I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents | of the wicked.
- ¹¹For the LORD God is both sun and shield, bestowing | grace and glory;
no good thing will the LORD withhold from those who walk | with integrity.
- ¹²O | LORD of hosts,
happy are they who put their | trust in you!

- This psalm was intended for those making a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem. It expresses the longing to see the temple, to be a part of the temple, as those “whose hearts are set on the pilgrim’s way.” How do we understand God’s “dwelling” now? As a contrast, hear the following three verses:
 - *“Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling-place” (Psalm 91:9)*
 - *“The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1)*
 - *“In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (John 14:2)*
- Our translation of verse 6 is different from most other translations. In most versions, you will see “Valley of Baca” (NIV, NRSV, KJV) or “valley of weeping” (Amplified) or “Dry Valley” (CEV, Good News). It may be a place name, where we do not know the present location. The only other times the word is used, it does refer to balsam trees, which in this region would be found in dry regions. It may also be the source of “balm,” although the word itself is different. The meaning remains unchanged: when we go through the “dry valleys” in our lives, God is there. God turns them into springs of water.

Second Lesson: Ephesians 2:11-22

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

- Paul declares that a mystery takes place in Christ: Jews and Gentiles – formerly opposed to one another – are now made one. In Christ, our walls of hostility and division are broken down. Are we living into that vision? How can we renew ourselves in that vision?
- In the vision of the church as a temple, Paul combines both tradition and present reality. We are built upon the foundation of those who have gone before, and we continue to grow so that together we might be a dwelling-place of God. Where does tradition provide our foundation? How do we continue to grow from that foundation?

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16

13 ‘You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. 14 ‘You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

- What does it mean to be the “salt of the earth”? Is Jesus talking about salt as a seasoning? Or as a preservative? Or both? What does it mean for salt to lose its taste?
- How are we doing being the salt of the earth? How are we doing being the light of the world or a city upon a hill? How are you doing with being these three?