

Reading Schedule for December 12-18, 2016

Most of the readings this week will be from Isaiah. Isaiah was an amazing prophet who spoke truth to a wandering generation, and gave them hope for the future, which would culminate in the coming of the Messiah. We will continue with reading Isaiah chapter 40, and then look at several other passages from Isaiah that have been used during the Advent season for many years. Reading from the Old Testament is especially meaningful because these words were written to people who had to wait for the promise. We now wait for Christ's second coming, and the glorious anticipation of his rule over the whole earth.

December 12 – Isaiah 40:6-20: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” (v.8) You will notice how many recognizable verses are found in this chapter. I also enjoy verse 11 because it talks about the tenderness of God, right after it tells us how powerful He is. Our God is amazing and his Word lasts forever. Public opinion changes and is unreliable, but God's Word is constant. You will find lasting solutions to your problems, and he will speak to your deepest needs as you absorb His Word into your heart. Whenever people have neglected God's Word, their spiritual life has weakened. As we close this year and anticipate the New Year, may your dedication to reading God's Word and applying it to your life be stronger than ever. What verse in this inspiring text got your attention?

December 13 – Isaiah 40:21-31: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (v.31) As if you couldn't imagine chapter 40 getting even better. I hope you have enjoyed these three days where we have focused on this monumental chapter. Different translations use the word wait or hope. But I prefer the word hope because it has a sense of connection and anticipation. In this pessimistic world, I can get pulled into thoughts of discouragement and feelings of sadness. There is plenty to be discouraged about in this world. But when it comes to the Lord, there is always room for hope. I read a book called A Reason for Hope, written specifically to those struggling with cancer. It is proven that those who remain hopeful will persevere through their illness of cancer much better and significantly longer. This verse promises us that we will soar. This has always been one of my favorite verses to remember when life is difficult. How do you respond to this reading today?

December 14 – Isaiah 11:1-10: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” (v.1) This is the introductory verses, and it is included in the Book of Revelation. Jesus will bring the promises of these verses to completion when he comes again to reign over all the earth. But it also gives us great encouragement that God had planned that a descendant of David would come and rule forever. In 2 Samuel 7:16, God gave David that promise. The Messiah is the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Savior. This is an encouraging Advent reading as we anticipate the culmination of God's plan for his people, and the kind of life we will live with him forever on the new earth. What do you notice in this Advent reading?

December 15 – Isaiah 61:1-11: “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim 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.” (v.1) I used verse one again because it launches everything in this chapter. Jesus used these very words to describe himself as he read from the Book of Isaiah in Luke 4. These words have become very important to us as a church. We

want to have a ministry to the brokenhearted, just like Jesus did. We get to proclaim the Lord's favor, asking people to respond to this gracious offer before the wrath of God descends on the earth. The verses that follow are less familiar. But is there anything in there that you noticed that lifted your heart? I was drawn to verse 10, which reminds me of salvation and being clothed in Christ with the robe of righteousness. What do you appreciate in these verses?

December 16 – Isaiah 52:1-12: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (v.7) This was a favorite song of mine as I would play guitar and lead Christian folk songs. Maybe you know the song, “Our God Reigns.” It is really beautiful to be a dispenser of good news. It is an amazing privilege. Paul uses this very verse in Romans chapter 10 to emphasize the importance of proclaiming the Gospel, for faith comes through hearing. We are called to show our faith, but we are also called to tell others about the reason for the hope that we have. Ask God to give you an opportunity to tell someone else about the Good News.

December 17 – Isaiah 55:1-13: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (v.9) Maybe you are familiar with these words as well. This chapter is very powerful, and it's full of promises. It invites us to come close to God and receive his goodness freely. So often in my life, I will say that God's ways are higher than my ways. What seems to be happening around me is not good, but I know the Lord is at work. I am also confident that he has my best in mind, and I am sure of that for your life too. Of all the marvelous verses in this chapter, which one do you notice? Verse 3 is a promise about God taking care of his people and making an everlasting covenant, which we know is the new covenant. Through Jesus, we have access to God, forgiveness of our sins, and the very presence of God living in us. This kind of covenant will last forever, even as it was proclaimed by Isaiah. How have these readings strengthened your spiritual life and stirred up your heart for the celebration of Christ's birth?

December 18 – John 1:1-18: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (v.14) This week we will read the most familiar Christmas messages in the New Testament. This will be a good way to launch our week of readings as we anticipate celebrating Christmas a week from today. In the most profound way, John tells us that Jesus came in the flesh to “pitch his tent” among us. When Christ was born, God became a man. We know the Scriptures teach that Jesus was completely human and completely divine . . . true man and true God. Jesus revealed the Father to us, and now we have One to identify with forever – the Lord Jesus Christ. These words are so inspiring to me because “The Word” means the revelation of God. That is exactly what Jesus was and is for us. What stands out to you the most in this chapter?

Prayers: Pray for our Christmas Food Bank this coming Saturday. Pray for the many connections we will experience as we have work parties, friendship connections and family gatherings, so that we might use the opportunity to point people to Christ.