

"Faith is the Key!"

Isaiah 61:1-4
February 14, 2010

James 4:1-10
St. James UCC

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It was a tough time in Israel. Unlike the good old days when David had been king, and Israel was strong, they were a conquered nation. Literally thousands of Israelites had been taken off into exile. Foreign armies were stationed in their land. Out of the little that they had, they paid taxes to their foreign rulers. The people were frightened and discouraged, and worried about what else might lie ahead.

It was to a people experiencing those emotions that we hear our text describing the mission of the prophet. Our passage begins with the simple words, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me". That is indeed the key. The prophet comes from God, to bring the word and teachings of God to a people that so desperately needs them. The prophet will bind up broken hearts, free captives and proclaim the year of God's favor. If the people will but walk with God, they will find hope where all seemed hopeless, and comfort where before there seemed to be none. We might say that the prophet is a bearer of good news - good news that comes from God.

In our second text we find a branch of the early church facing difficult times. We're told that the members of that church harbored rancor and malice, along with tendencies toward violence. At times their gatherings would erupt into open bickering and even fights. Some commentators believe that within this church were a group of zealots or fanatics who were engaged in hostile activities toward the government, behavior which others feared might lead to a reaction of suppression and persecution.

In any case, James responds to the situation by calling on the members of the church to turn to God. In the midst of the difficult times that they face, in the face of the dissension in their midst, God is the source of their salvation. It is their faith and their faith alone that will see them through.

I selected these passages because I believe that we are in the midst of difficult times as well. Now we don't face dissension and violence in our midst. We aren't a conquered nation, and members of our families haven't been sent off into exile. Yet this is still a difficult and turbulent time indeed.

Our world is broken - filled with people who would lash out and kill and injure others, all in an effort to achieve their own ends. We have many people who experience hunger daily, hundreds of thousands in places like Haiti who are still homeless, millions and millions of people without jobs. The stories of tragedy that abound - within our own nation as well as in every single country of the world.

How do we go through this time as Christians? How do we live out our faith in the midst of fear and anguish and so much more? It's a difficult path that our God asks us to follow, and in numerous passages Jesus made no bones about how difficult the path is.

Both of our passages for today remind us that when we face difficult times, the key is our faith. It is God who will see us through. It is God who will be our source of strength and hope. It is God who will help us to walk through whatever it is that lies ahead, knowing that we do not face it alone, for God is with us.

In this time, I believe that we all need to come together, seeking to deepen our faith and praying fervently to God.

- ◆ I believe that we are called to pray for the safety of our service men and women, and to pray just as hard for the safety of the civilians in places like Iraq and Afghanistan - that they might indeed find the path of peace.
- ◆ I believe that we are called to pray that God's will might be done in this situation, and that we might be agents of that will
- ◆ I believe that we are called to pray that somehow the turmoil and the strife that runs rampant in the world might lead to more peaceful times, and to greater understanding between the various peoples of the world.
- ◆ I believe that we are called to love rather than hate, and to deepen our faith, seeking God's guidance not only for ourselves as individuals, but for our nation, and indeed for our world.
- ◆ I believe that we are called to ask what can we give, rather than what can we get.

Back in World War II during the terrible days of the Blitz, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In the front yard was a shell hole. Seeking shelter as soon as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow.

Terrified, yet hearing his father's voice telling him to jump, the boy replied, "I can't see you!"

The father, looking up against the sky tinted red by the burning buildings, called to the silhouette of his son, "But I can see you. Jump!"

The boy jumped, because he trusted his father.

Our faith guides us through the turmoil, the uncertainties, the fears that are so much a part of life. It enables us to face all of these not because we can see clearly what lies ahead, but because we live with the certainty that we are seen by God. It enables us to face all of the issues that abound and are filled with pain not because we know all of the answers, because we don't, rather we face the turmoil knowing that we are known by God, and it is God who will see us and guide us through these difficult days.

Amen.