

04.26.26 ~ Easter 4
“Happy 23rd Anniversary, United Baptist!”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Words of Prophecy

Isaiah 58:5-14 NRSVUE

Pew Bible 631

- ⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
- ⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
- ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
- ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
- ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.”
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
- ¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
- ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your needs in parched places
and make your bones strong,
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never fail.
- ¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

¹³ If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,
 from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
 if you call the Sabbath a delight
 and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
 if you honor it, not going your own ways,
 serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs;
¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the Lord,
 and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
 I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
 for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Leader: These Are God's Words of Prophecy.

People: Thanks be to God!

Words of Unity

Acts 2:42-47 ^{NRSVUE}

Pew Bible 949

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Life among the Believers

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Leader: These Are Important Words of Unity!

People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

God, you are the ultimate provider of all that we need. We proclaim it because Christ is risen from the grave! Through his sacrifice, we have freedom from all sin. Because of you we are in a church that has served for several generations. Help us to remember our covenant with you and each other to fulfill your kingdom mission on earth. Help us to be the people and to do the things Isaiah prophecies. May we live out lives of devotion, service, action, compassion, and mostly love. Let us show others that there is resurrection! We seek your wisdom and faith to remember this fact every day. We praise you for the history of this church, the freedom to worship and study your word, and we seek your strength and determination to continue the Mission and Vision of United Baptist Church. Please speak through this familiar message and messenger. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Happy 23rd Anniversary, United Baptist Church! Ancient Israel used to celebrate great historical events wherever God revealed himself

like the Exodus and crossing the Red Sea; the Passover when God struck the firstborn of Egypt unless the Israelites' homes were marked with lamb's blood; receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai; and in Joshua 4, the twelve tribes marking with stones the passing over river Jordan into the promised land of Israel. Our culture celebrates birthdays, lives after death, anniversaries, and federal holidays – some are Godly and some are secular – but all have meaning. For those reasons both human and divinely ordered, we acknowledge our anniversary today.

Both First Baptist Church of Annandale and Boulevard Baptist individually were founded over 80 years ago, yet in 2002, began to wonder what it might look like to consolidate two small churches who had planted others but declined in number into one new vibrant church. They met, envisioned possibilities, explored resources, and got to know each other, taking the best of both churches to build a new one called The United Baptist Church which officially began April 27, 2003, here in this building! As you may or may not know, Boulevard sold their building in Falls Church to move here. It was a bold move then and informs other struggling and courageous churches even today. If you were involved, give yourself a pat on the back for your sacrifice, foresight, and courage.

We just read our covenant together and it was edited to reflect both congregations and tweaked over the years. We remind ourselves how this institution should be functioning, not necessarily how it does. We have our faults, failures, successes, and strengths. They exist through each of us being in community together, and trying to do our best, and like Jesus, forgiving what we do wrong or do not do. Our faith and our church are

built on a rock, and our sure foundation is Jesus Christ. That is not news to most of us, but it is helpful to be reminded every now and again.

We are not the perfect church and never will be! Hopefully, we are appropriate for you and your faith journey. We are growing spiritually together into mature faith. Hopefully, we will become the church home for new seekers and families within our community and region. We can only be that if we continue to strive to fulfill our mission and vision, which is not just about fellowship, but is about how we help spread the kingdom of God's good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Both Isaiah and Acts have some things to teach us about being church.

The prophet Isaiah recognizes that the relationship of God with his chosen people was more important than any rituals they practiced as it should be with us at this time and place. The goal was and still is loving the triune God and having a worship that is pleasing to him. Worship happens not just on Sundays; there was formal worship at a wedding here yesterday, informal worship at the Food Mission giveaway Saturday; on Wednesday last week, we prayed for those who received and thanked God for the people and resources to do Sandwich Ministry; we helped a desperate soul here on Thursday by listening to his family's story and providing partial rent; and we are providing space for three churches to worship in this building today! Our purpose and mission are to live out the Gospel, to help others, seek justice, feed the poor, house the homeless, care for the physically and emotionally ill, clothe the naked, free the oppressed, and to be the light and healing beyond our walls into this fractured community, state, and country in which we live. We support our citizens who are in shock over yet another Presidential assassination

attempt. We pray for our country's leaders, judges, military, and legislators. The church is still needed! Social consciousness done with loving kindness; each generation has its slavery and those who despair. How else can we be the hands and feet of Jesus? Isaiah reminds us to honor all persons, be strong, well-watered gardens; restore the streets we live in and repair the breach, both physically and relationally if needed!

Although Isaiah was referring to the returning exiles after the Babylonian invasion, this message is relevant today. And how do we do this with such a small congregation? Through the mission and vision of the church we already have in place! We look at the early house churches in Acts. William Barclay, Scottish interpreter and theologian, in his well-known Biblical commentary series simplifies the Acts church model: learn, fellowship, pray, be a reverent church, a church of actions watching for God's signs and wonders, a sharing church, a happy place to worship, and a good church other people could not help but like. These are good attributes for us as well. The Acts congregations practiced the fellowship of believers by breaking bread together in community meals and even sold their worldly goods to help those who had nothing (voluntarily maintained property for the common good of all). They were devoted to one another, thanking God for their many blessings, and raised funds for charity. Our covenant sets the tone and guidelines of how we will go forward obediently to be the faith community and Mission Center God intended. The sacrifice we just celebrated with Easter should spur us on to continue meeting together, serving the community, studying God's word, and caring for one another in sickness and in health, inviting others to join us on this pilgrimage to share the Gospel in actions and words, no

matter the violence or cultural challenges we face. We are **united** as one foundation. Christ is changing us, growing us spiritually, invigorating our purpose, stewarding our resources, and empowering us to share his love, grace, mercy, wisdom, and maturity with a spiritually famished generation.

On this 23rd Anniversary, I charge you to open your hearts and speak to others to share how God is working here. You are doing and supporting Kingdom work in this location. Others see it; do you? Congratulations on the excellent work already done, and blessings on the work we have yet to do! Amen? Amen! ||

Please pray with me: Dear Jesus, we love you. We thank you for your sacrifice and forgiveness. We thank you for this church, both our history and our future. You are the source and foundation of our love and God's grace. Help us to be grounded in the roots of resurrection, nourished and strong like the trunk of your Word; give us courage to branch out to others who do not know you. Let us share Christ's salvation with others who need you. We celebrate the work done through you and ask for strength to continue the work in front of us. Please, Lord, bless our efforts and open these doors to the broken-hearted and the open-hearted so they can see you through us. We pray in your name, Amen.