

**Rappahannock Christian Church – 1/1/12**  
**Dr. Kenneth Wilbur**

**Communion Meditation**

Today is the first day of the New Year. We're looking ahead today. Nothing has really changed overnight, but the day does have the feel of anticipation about it. We wonder, today, what the future may hold.

As we come to this Table, I think about the new start that we all have in Christ because our debt has been cancelled. It's paid in full, and we have a great opportunity as we live every day as in and for Christ. Let me read these words that are recorded by Matthew in the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of his gospel.

**Matthew 26:26-29** - While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

**A Great Cover-Up**

Today we're going to turn in Scripture to Isaiah chapter 61. This is fitting for the New Year. It speaks of some new thing that God is going to do.

**Isaiah 61:10 – 62:3** - I delight greatly in the LORD;  
my soul rejoices in my God.  
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation  
and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness,  
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,  
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.  
For as the soil makes the sprout come up  
and a garden causes seeds to grow,  
so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise  
spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,  
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,  
her salvation like a blazing torch.  
The nations will see your righteousness,  
and all kings your glory;  
you will be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.  
You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,  
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

It's New Year's Day! That change from one year to the next makes us think about changes we may want to make. Maybe you want to lose some pounds that you gained during the holidays. Perhaps you could pay off a debt, mend a relationship, do something else that's on your to-do list. What a perfect time for us to hear the prophet Isaiah speak about a new start that is on its way! God, Isaiah says, is going to do something NEW!

I have often said that a single passage in God's word sometimes has both an immediate and a future scope. This is so for a lot of the passages in Isaiah, and it's true here. Part of what God says is that he is going to bring His people back to their homeland. Their sin and disobedience have brought very terrible consequences. They were attacked by a mighty foreign power -the Babylonians! Many Israelites have been taken away to be slaves. Their country has become a vassal state within the Babylonian empire. So much death and destruction has come crushing down on them!!! These people are asking, rightly, what's my status now? Are we still God's people, or has He cast us away? Is our inheritance lost forever into our enemies' hands? Will God listen to our cries for mercy, forgiveness and restoration? These are totally legitimate questions. Don't forget that, when God made this covenant, He said, "If you obey, blessings will follow; but if you disobey you will be cut off." So they ask, rightly, is our future within God's plan forever taken from us?

We may think the same way at times when things are going badly. We know that we have failed. We've messed up. We've hurt others. We have failed to do what we should. How is anyone going to love us, forgive us, welcome and embrace us after *that*?!!! And with God it's even worse. With people sometimes we can hide our faults and cover up what we've done. We can lie or try to push the blame onto someone else. But not with God! God knows our very *thoughts*! No room for excuses there! No chance to wriggle off the hook

But God tells the people through Isaiah that their punishment is completed. He says, "Yes, I have allowed the consequences to come to pass for the things you have done. You have had to pay. But it is finished." God says, "I am now going to allow you to return and rebuild and reclaim the land of your inheritance." What a blessed, welcome word of hope and joy that must have been for those people!

There's more to it than this, though. Isaiah speaks of God clothing the people with garments of salvation and arraying them in a robe of righteousness. How is this going to happen? What does it mean?

God is revealing bigger plans. His message to them is about much more than a return to the way things were. God is speaking of "restoration" on a grand scale. God says that what he is going to do is something which the people cannot do for themselves. God will PUT the garments of salvation and righteousness ON THEM. He will save them and make them clean, innocent, righteous. They are not capable of doing this themselves.

What God wanted all along was for His people to be a beacon to the nations. He wanted them to live such exemplary lives that he would be able to shower them with blessings. This was to be seen by the nations -a compelling witness! And then the Gentiles would want to come and worship the true, living God and to follow his ways. Their enthusiasm would be infectious!!! Instead, the people decided, time and again, to go their own way and to ignore God's call to

righteousness, compassion and justice. They never did achieve God's grand design for them. But the time is coming, says Isaiah, when God will save his people and clothe them in righteousness.

How is He going to do this?

You know, of course. – God sends his Son, Jesus Christ, who lives a perfect life and then sacrifices Himself on the cross, enabling us to exchange our filthy rags for His wonderful clean robe of righteousness. Those who believe are clothed in Christ's own Righteousness. They are reckoned clean, holy, cleansed through him.

Today, you may think that you have totally lost out, that you have overstepped the mark because of what you have done in the past. You're not alone. A lot of people think that way. But I tell you on the authority of God's Word, that that is not true. It is NEVER too late for the opportunity to come to God and be used by Him. God's mercy is so great that he is willing to forgive and cleanse people like us! While there is breath in your body there is always the opportunity to throw yourself at the foot of the cross and ask God to forgive you. And he has promised to forgive and cleanse you.

Today is the first day of 2012. Let this small new beginning remind you of God's mercy and his offer to make you into a new creation!

### **Benediction**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.