

First Sunday after Epiphany – January 8, 2017
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Isaiah 42:1-7

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. 2) He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3) A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4) he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope." 5) This is what God the LORD says-- the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 6) "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7) to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

The season of epiphany is here – it's the time of the church year in which our attention is drawn toward Scripture texts which reveal to us who Jesus is and what he does for us. These texts will strengthen our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we consider the Old Testament lesson for today

Theme: The Lord's Servant is Revealed to You

1. He provides justice for you
2. He provides life for you
3. He provides freedom and light for you

Through the Prophet Isaiah the Lord makes an announcement: Here is my servant. His words sound like a drum roll and a fanfare as he calls special attention to the work of his servant. He is the one the Lord will uphold and in whom he will delight. The Spirit will be poured out on him and he will provide justice for the nations.

The Lord is talking about Jesus himself. Although others like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Caleb were the Lord's servants, none of them did what this servant would do – provide justice for the nations. Yes, the others were chosen by the Lord and called to serve him. Yes, he watched over them and took delight in them even pouring his Spirit on them to equip them for their tasks. But none of them could provide justice for the nations.

The others served the Lord's people this servant would serve all nations – Jew and Gentile alike. He provides justice for all including you and me. When we hear the word justice, we might think of the word fairness. But in this situation the word is being used in a legal sense. He will justify the nations. He will provide them with a legal judgment of being righteous and perfect -- holy and innocent.

It's true as God's word declares that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All nations stand condemned by God and under his wrath. But the Lord's servant went to bat for the nations – he obtained justice – a judgment of not guilty by placing himself under the wrath of God for all and offering to God his own righteousness for all.

He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3) A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4) he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.

With a quiet, humble passion and dedication to those who are weak, this servant will persevere until he obtains his objective. These words describe for us how the Lord's servant went into action for us.

He doesn't shout or raise his voice against us like we as parents often do when it comes to dealing with our naughty children. He's calm and gentle. He's patient and caring. He understands our weakness and comes to support and strengthen us. Bruised reeds – that's what we are by nature. Earlier Isaiah had proclaimed: (Isaiah 40:6-8) **A voice says, All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. 7) The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. 8) The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."**

Bruised and bent by our sins and the law of God – Jesus will come not to break us but to build us up. The fire of faith and life may be weak and smoldering about to go out but Jesus comes not to extinguish that fire but to gently fan it until it glows bright and burns hot again.

This Epiphany season, as we once again beheld Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Lord's servant was being revealed to us. There we heard the Father proclaim – this is my son, whom I love. I am pleased with him. There the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove. These were signs telling us that the one John baptized was the Lord's Servant.

John the Baptist explained: (John 1:32-34) **"I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33) And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34) I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."**

Jesus had persuaded John to baptize him by saying that all righteousness must be fulfilled. By being baptized Jesus was identifying himself with sinners for whom he came to provide justice. And as the Holy Spirit was poured out on him Jesus was empowered for his mission – a mission which would take him to the cross where he would lay down his innocent life in payment for the sins of the world so that he justify the nations.

With his sacrifice the Lord's servant obtained that justice as the Apostle Paul reminds us: (Romans 3:23-26) **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (24) and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (25) God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- (26) he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.**

Through faith in Jesus, you enjoy the justice the Lord's servant has provided for you. Isaiah's prophecy revealed the Servant of the Lord as one who provides justice and one who provides life for you.

Again, the Lord God speaks through Isaiah but before Isaiah shares his words with us; he describes him as a God who is active on behalf of his creation. **This is what God the LORD says-- the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:**

Jesus, the servant of the Lord, is not only true man he is also true God. In his Gospel John introduces us to the Lord's servant – calling him the Word, and describing him in this way: (John 1:10-13) **He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11) He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12) Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in**

his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13) children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Of course, it's absolutely true that Jesus gave life to the world at the time of creation. But when he came as our Savior he came to give us new life – life as God's children. He came to give us spiritual life.

Through our baptisms we are born again as God's children and heirs of eternal life just as Jesus told Nicodemus: (John 3:5) **"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit."**

We needed this new life because by nature we were born sinful and lived in the darkness of sin as slaves of the devil. The Lord God who created us and wanted us to enjoy eternal life with him sent his Son as his servant to give you new life by providing freedom and light for you.

Our text concludes by giving us an opportunity to “eavesdrop” in a conversation between the Lord and his Servant. **"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7) to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.**

The Lord God assures his servant that he will be with him and will make him a covenant for the people (a term used to speak of the OT nation of Israel). Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the covenants God made with Abraham and David. He was the descendant of Abraham through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. And he was the ruler from the line of David who would rule forever. But more importantly he set aside the covenant God established with his people at Mount Sinai by perfectly fulfilling the laws God gave his people at Sinai as the writer to the Hebrews assures us:

(Hebrews 9:13-15) The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14) How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! 15) For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

But the OT covenant at Sinai was only between the Lord and his people the Jews. But the Lord God had more in mind for his servant. He told that servant in Isaiah 49:6 **"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."**

We can enjoy that salvation because the Lord Jesus has opened our eyes to see the salvation that he has won for us. He has set us free from our slavery to sin. We are now a people who have been called out of darkness into his wonderful light to declare the praises of him who has enable us to be a chosen people and a holy nation and a people belonging to God. (1 Peter 2:9)

The Lord has revealed his servant to us through the prophet Isaiah and other Scriptures today – reminding us

1. He provides justice for you
2. He provides life for you
3. He provides freedom and light for you

Just as Isaiah reminded the Jews that the Servant of the Lord would be a blessing for all nations so also we are reminded that the Servant of the Lord whom we have seen revealed to us today is not just our servant but the servant of all. And so we will indeed seek to declare his praises to the nations as we proclaim his gospel to our families, to our neighbors and friends, to our classmates and co-workers, to our communities and through missionaries whom we support with our prayers and dollars to places throughout the world. May God fill us with vigor as we seek to share his name with others. Amen.