

In the Name of Jesus

January 15, 2017 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany (Annual Meeting)

Text: Isaiah 49:1-6 – **THE WELL-USED SERVANT OF THE LORD**

Scripture Readings: 1 Corinthians 12:1-12, John 2:1-11

Hymns: 869:1-4 [LSB], 126, 132, 869:5

1 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. 2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. 3 He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.” 4 But I said, “I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.” 5 And now the LORD says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength— 6 he says: “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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”

In the name of Jesus, the Lord of the Church, dearly beloved of God:

This is Annual Meeting Sunday. The day when a special meeting will be held after the service, when important decisions for the welfare of our congregation will be made. If you’re a voting member be encouraged to remain for the meeting if you can. If you’re a non-voter you’re also welcome to attend. We need members who are committed to the task of serving the Lord. It has been said:

- Christian churches are only as strong as its individual members are spiritually strong.
- Spiritual strength comes from the Word and Sacraments.
- Strong congregations are those that have a high percentage of their members actively involved in worship, Bible study, fellowship meetings.
- Each individual member, strengthened by the Word and Sacraments, will then use his or her God-given spiritual gifts in the congregation for His glory and the blessing of the whole congregation.

So that we may receive strength for our faith-walk and our Christian calling as beloved disciples of Christ, we give prayerful consideration this morning to a beautiful “epiphany text” from Isaiah, which contains a prophecy about the **THE WELL-USED SERVANT OF THE LORD** (Jesus), whom the heavenly Father would use ...

1. To speak His Word.
2. To display his splendor.
3. To restore and bring back His people.

1.

What's interesting about this text is that Isaiah, under inspiration of the Spirit, draws back the curtain, as it were, on the windows of heaven. He takes us back into eternity, and provides an opportunity for us to listen in on a conversation that the first and second persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son are having. We hear the Son say: "Listen up everyone! Perk up your ears to what I'm about to say: Long before that memorable trip which Joseph and Mary took down to Bethlehem, before the angel's birth announcement to the shepherd, before the Baby in a manger asleep the hay ... My Father chose Me to be His Servant. He told Me: "'Tis time to have compassion, Son. Go, bright Jewel of My crown and bring man salvation. From sin and sorrow set him free. Slay bitter death for him that he may live with You forever."

From this we learn that Jesus knew what His life's task would be from the "get-go". Sometimes as children grow up they wonder what they should do with their life. Even after they choose a career path – teacher, veterinarian, computer geek – they may change their minds. Not so Jesus. He knew (before the world existed) exactly what He was going to be: The Servant of the Lord. Our Servant. Our Savior. And He was determined not to veer from that "career path" even a little.

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An important aspect of Jesus' God-given work as His Servant (and ours) is described by Isaiah in this way: "**He made my mouth like a sharpened sword**" (v.2). Isaiah is picturing for us that Jesus' work would involve speaking words He had received from His Father. His words would be "sharp and to the point" (so to speak), not mincing words. In love He would tell people not necessarily what their ears wanted to hear but what their hearts needed to hear. The message of sin and its punishment: eternal death in hell. The message of grace, that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish in hell's misery but live on forever. That would be golden theme of Jesus' entire ministry.

I also like that other description Isaiah here gives of Jesus: His Father would make Him to be a polished arrow concealed in His quiver (v.2). The thought here is that Jesus from time of His birth would be a tool in His Father hand which He would use to bestow, over and over again, countless blessings to countless souls. Like a tool you have at home that stays shiny and polished because you use it a lot. A kitchen knife or screw driver ... because it's a handy instrument and gets the job done. That's the thought Isaiah presents here regarding Jesus. The Word that He would speak would "get the job done" of leading people to repentance and faith, and bringing them into possession of God's precious gift of eternal life. (It's also why Paul describes the Word of God as "**the sword of the Spirit**" (Ephesians 6:17).

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On this Annual Meeting Sunday, as we plan our work for the year, may we be reminded that just as God used His Jesus Son as an effective instrument in His hand during His earthly ministry, He promises to do the same today. This is so when from our perspective Jesus' Word seems to be an ineffective tool. We may feel that way at times, like the work we do as a congregation, the witnessing we do for Jesus with friends isn't accomplishing much.

It's interesting to note how Isaiah prophesied that Jesus (while He was in His lowly servant-form, during His ministry here below), would be tempted to feel that way too. We read in verses 2-4:

- **“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver ... *But I said, 'I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.'*”**

During the first year of His ministry only a few knew Jesus. During the second year He grew to be quite popular, with crowds traveling great distances to see Him. In the third year of His ministry, He was rejected and killed. As He approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (five before His crucifixion) and saw the city, He lamented: **“If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.”** Yes, Jesus was tempted to believe His work had met with failure. But He didn't succumb! Isaiah goes on to record these words of the Savior: **“Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God.”** Jesus continued to trust that His Father would use His death for the greatest good. By His death on Calvary a harvest of souls would be gathered into heaven, and that made Him rejoice!

It gladdens our hearts too. We know that **“the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to those who are being saved it's the power of God. God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe” (1 Corinthians 1:18,21).**

2.

That was the ultimate purpose for God sending His Son to the world and using Him like a sharpened sword and polished arrow ... *to display His splendor*. When people are led to a knowledge of the Truth, when they're granted the great epiphany that God's Son came to earth so we might have life to the full (here *and* hereafter), it has the effect of God's splendor being put on display. It shows what a great and powerful, what a gracious and compassionate God we have.

Two Scriptures that come to mind in this regard (which also reinforce this wonderful truth):

- When a group of Greeks approached Jesus' disciples on Palm Sunday and asked them for an audience with Him, He said: **“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it**

produces many seeds ... Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again"** (John 12:24-28).

- Four days later, on Maundy Thursday, Jesus prayed: **"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I've brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"** (John 17:1ff).

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The significance (sweet application) this has for us as a Christian congregation? It offers wonderful inspiration for the work the Lord has called us to do as His servants. Think of it! He has given us the privilege of working for Him, of sharing this message of life in Jesus with each other (as we gather in His house each Sunday) and spreading it to others. When we do so it redounds to the glory of His Savior-name!

3.

This leads us into the concluding thought of today's sermon. Let's note how in the final verses of our text Isaiah records these words of Jesus:

- ***"And now the LORD says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength— he says: "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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

Following successful completion of the mission His Father gave Him to do as His Servant, the Gospel would go out into the world. God would work extraordinary things from that ordinary message of a Man who killed on a cross whose body was laid in the grave, and who came alive. In our text we hear the Father saying to His Son: "The work I'm giving to You as My Servant is too grand and wonderful to be limited to a few. I'm sending You into the world to be the glory of My people Israel AND a light for the Gentiles too! So many more people may be brought back, restored to Me, and live with Me in heaven."

This underscores the importance of the great commission He has given us to spread the Good News. We petition the Lord to bless the kingdom work we're doing for Him here in the Denver area. We will want to utilize the opportunities He gives for speaking to others about the reason for the hope we have in Christ. We will also want to stay informed about the mission work we're doing in our wider church family, the CLC, in cities like

Atlanta, Detroit, Mapleton ND, Appleton WI, Tacoma WA, British Columbia, and in our overseas missions in Africa, India, Nepal, Myanmar.

So we close with this mission prayer from Psalm 67:

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him. Amen.