

Sermon for January 15, 2017 – 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-6 (Evangelical Heritage Version)

Theme: **“You are my Servant, in whom I will display my glory.”**

- 1) *God the Father said this to Jesus*
- 2) *He says this to us, who are clothed with Christ.*

Listen to me, you coastlands. Pay attention, you far away peoples! The LORD called me from the womb. When I was inside my mother he mentioned my name. ²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. He hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me a polished arrow. He concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my glory.” ⁴But I myself said, “I have labored in vain. I spent my strength and got nothing at all. Yet my verdict is with the LORD, and my reward is with my God.” ⁵But now the LORD who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to turn Jacob back to him, so that Israel might be gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—⁶the LORD said, “It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the ones I have kept in Israel, so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations so that my salvation may be known to the end of the earth.”

“All the witnessing I do for Christ seems to be in vain!” I am sure all of us have felt this way at one point or another. We try to confess Christ to our family, friends and community – only to have that confession fall on deaf ears. Worse yet, some tell us to stop annoying them with all our “God talk”. “What’s the point?” we are tempted to think, “Nobody seems to believe me. Maybe it would be better if I just kept quiet about my faith.”

The devil wants to prevent us from confessing Christ to others by making us feel frustrated. Would it surprise you if I told you that even our Savior faced the temptation of frustration? He certainly did! How did He overcome it? By putting his faith in his Father and all the promises He made concerning Him.

And did you know that we too can have the same confidence Jesus had? With our Savior himself as our guide, let us learn how, under the theme: **“You are my Servant, in whom I will display my glory.”** 1) *God the Father said this to Jesus.* 2) *He says this to us, who are clothed with Christ.*

Part One: God the Father says this to Jesus

Even though our text was written some 700 years before Jesus’ birth, he is the one speaking it. How is that possible? Because Jesus is both true God and true man. As true God, he existed from eternity and inspired Isaiah to record the thoughts and feelings he would have during his ministry on this earth.

He calls out: *Listen to me, you coastlands. Pay attention, you far away peoples!* Jesus wants the whole world to know who he is and what he came to do. He is the Savior that the LORD promised to send ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, who would restore mankind's relationship with God. And how would he do that? By taking on human flesh and blood in the womb of a virgin so that he could remain true God while also being true man.

Jesus says: *The LORD called me from the womb. When I was inside my mother he mentioned my name.* Even though there was nothing about Jesus' looks that would make a person think, "he must be the Savior," God appointed him as such. Before Jesus was born, God the Father sent an angel to tell Mary and Joseph exactly who he would be. Matthew records the angel saying: *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*"²² *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:*²³ *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-- which means, "God with us."*

God the Father appointed Jesus to be his special servant who would save his people. How? Jesus tells us next: *²He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. He hid me in the shadow of his hand. He made me a polished arrow. He concealed me in his quiver. ³He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my glory."*

Did you notice how Jesus "mouth" is described as a sword? In the book of revelation, St. John describes a vision he had of Jesus. He writes: *". . .out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword."* (Revelation 1:16) Both this vision and Jesus' words in our text emphasize the power of his Word to both strike down the sinful pride that corrupts the human heart as well as cut us from the bonds of guilt with which the devil keeps us enslaved. The Law and Gospel are the two edges of His Word – each with its unique purpose. And just as a sword is used in close combat and an arrow for distance, so Jesus' words would conquer hearts both far and near.

But the LORD kept Jesus hidden *in the shadow of his hand and concealed . . . in his quiver* (that is, he kept his identity a secret from the public) until the time came for him to begin his ministry in earnest. That happened at his baptism, when Jesus was publicly anointed with the Holy Spirit as God the Father declared him to be his Son. At that event the LORD revealed Jesus to the world as his servant – true Israel - in preparation of whom the entire nation of Israel existed. But, unlike that nation, Jesus would perfectly keep God's laws and offer the one true sacrifice which would make atonement for the sins of the world. In Jesus, God would reveal his glory.

But Jesus' ministry was not easy. The people he came to save largely rejected him. The religious leaders persecuted him. Even his own disciples had trouble believing in him! On top of this he felt the burden of our sins weighing on him as every day brought him closer to his sacrifice. Can you even imagine what it was like for him to have one of his own hand-picked disciples betray him; to see all the rest scatter at his arrest; to hear the disciple who pledged unwavering support disown him; to hear the same crowds that heralded him as the Messiah insist on his crucifixion?

In the weakness of all he suffered, is it any wonder we hear him say: *"I have labored in vain. I spent my strength and got nothing at all"*? And yet, even in this, Jesus did not sin. As

incredibly frustrating and discouraging as his ministry was, Jesus put his trust in his Father, saying: *“Yet my verdict is with the LORD, and my reward is with my God.”*

Jesus trusted the LORD would vindicate him. True: Jesus would die as a criminal but, in the end, the LORD would reveal his innocence to all by raising him from the grave. Not only that, but God would exalt Jesus to the highest place in heaven – seating him on his throne and giving him authority over all. Jesus confesses so much, when he says: *⁵But now the LORD who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to turn Jacob back to him, so that Israel might be gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—⁶the LORD said, “It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the ones I have kept in Israel, so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations so that my salvation may be known to the end of the earth.”*

Yes, Jesus certainly was God’s special servant, in whom the LORD displayed his wonderful, saving glory. Even though, Jesus' ministry looked like a complete failure at his crucifixion, God faithfully turned it into a wonderful victory! Not only did Jesus win salvation for the Jews, he won it for the entire world!

God wants his Son to be glorified throughout the earth. This is why he poured out the Holy Spirit upon Jesus’ disciples, and commissioned them to preach the Gospel in all the world. He wants everyone to know about the salvation His Son won for them. He wants all people everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. This is why God not only chose Jesus to be His special servant, He also chose us who believe in Jesus to tell the world about everything His Son has accomplished.

Part Two: *He says this to us, who are clothed with Christ.*

Yes, God chose you, dear Christian. Before the creation of the world, God foreknew and loved you to such a degree that He decided to send His Son to save you from the rebellion and sin with which he knew that you would be corrupted. He loved you so much that, even before you were born, he planned how he would lead you to repentance and give spiritual birth to you by awakening faith in your heart.

Just think: at your baptism God the Father anointed you with the Holy Spirit, put Christ’s name on you, and clothed you with the forgiveness and righteousness Jesus won through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection! From now on, whenever God looks at you, He sees his Son. From now on he wants you to represent his Son – using your words and actions to direct people to Jesus, and the salvation that he won for all. He made you his ambassador and, as such, wants you to use his law to call people to repentance and his Gospel to comfort all who are repentant.

But this is frustrating work. So many of the people we deeply care about don’t listen to us. Sometimes friends and family members will even begin to hate us for warning them about their sins and directing them to Jesus. Is it all worth it? I mean, we can spend years praying and witnessing, and nothing seems to change. Is it all in vain?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whenever you are tempted to feel this way, remember that Jesus also endured such temptations. He knows exactly how you feel. Trust me: his ministry was far more frustrating than ours could ever be! But he also wants you to have the same hope he had: your vindication is with the LORD and your reward is with God! He will keep all his promises regarding your witnessing. No matter how things look, nothing you do for him is in vain. He will keep his promise to rescue you from the evil world. As a matter of fact, he will use you in ways you never thought possible. You see, its not enough for you to be his servant – confessing Christ to your family, friends and neighbors. No, he uses you to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth.

How? Through your offerings you are helping to train and send out pastors, teachers and missionaries into the world. Through your prayers you are upholding their confession and extending the light of God’s gospel to every corner of the earth. Through kind words and deeds you glorify God – attracting people to Christ. Many times, without even knowing it, people watch and hear your confession of Christ and are led closer to him.

Because of our connection to Jesus through faith, what the LORD said of him is also true of us: You are his servant, in whom he will display his glory. Take comfort in the fact that the LORD has loved you so much that he forgave all your sins and made you his child by calling you to repentance in faith. And now live as the dearly loved child of God that the LORD declared you to be – serving him by confessing Christ to the world. No matter how things may seem, your confession is never in vain. God will use you to glorify His Son. And, as you hold on to him in faith, he will keep his promise to safely deliver you from this life, home to himself in heaven. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 1:21-23 NIV84