



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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January 16, 2011

Epiphany 2

Sermon Text: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 89](#)

Second Lesson: [Acts 13:38-49](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 1:29-41](#)

Listen to The Servant's Trust

Confident in the Lord's Plan

Proclaimed by the Servant's Servants

Every year it happens when the ice first starts forming on the waters and then again in the Spring when it starts to get a little warmer. You read stories, you hear stories on the radio or on television of people who trusted what their eyes saw and were deceived. They thought the ice was thick enough to support them or their snowmobile or their vehicle, and it wasn't. Someone had to go out and risk life and limb to help them out.

Trusting what our eye's see can get us in trouble sometimes when we are wrong. But this morning, we see something that's kind of the same...trusting what our eyes see when it looks like nothing is going the right way. That can also get us into trouble. So we are urged by the Servant of the Lord to trust in God.

We see that as we hear this discussion back and forth between the Servant of the Lord and the Lord. We see the Servant of the Lord, who is faced with challenges. What his eyes see are leading him to doubt God's plans. At the same time we hear him being confident in the Lord's plans. And we are also reminded how the Servant's servants need to be busy about trusting and being confident in God's plan and proclaiming that plan.

The first half of the Book of Isaiah, 1-39, is full of God's warnings and God's judgment. There are Gospel promises in there, but the general theme of the first 39 chapters is "You guys better repent or you are going to be carried off into exile." In Chapter 40 it turns, even before they are carried off into exile, to addressing the children of Israel who are now in exile and how God will comfort them in their distress and how he will deliver them. He names the guy he is going to deliver them through, Cyrus, even before Cyrus is born. As he uses this picture of how he is going to deliver Israel from their captivity, their exile, he also uses it to show how he is going to deliver all people from the captivity and the exile away from God that is the result of our sin.

So in this section we again hear about the Servant of the Lord, just like we heard last week. The Servant of the Lord is revealed to us a little bit more about who he is and what he would do and the struggles he would have. That's kind of what we see here. There are some that take this "*Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name*"; and they think maybe it is talking about Cyrus. Maybe this is the Servant and he's talking about the release of Israel. But it

doesn't really fit Cyrus as well about bringing all the nations and bringing this deliverance to all the nations. If it was only Israel, maybe it would make sense.

Then when it says, "*He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor'*"; the rabbis took this as the Servant of God being the nation of Israel itself. But when you look and see how it says, "*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,*" it doesn't make sense then that it would be the nation Israel either.

You are really left with only one conclusion. This Servant of the Lord that is talking here is the same Servant we met last week when the Lord introduced him to us...it's the one who would be the Messiah. It's the Servant who finds his fulfillment in Jesus. And as you consider these words from Isaiah, you can see how it's fulfilled in Jesus.

Listen to what it says. Jesus speaking 700 years before he was born says, "*He*" (God) "*said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'*" He is the fulfillment of everything. The reason God had this special relationship with Israel was so that the Messiah would come from Israel. So he is the fulfillment of everything, why God has chosen them. He says, "*Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.*" Do you remember how he sent the angels, the shepherds, to reveal who this Jesus was that was born?

Then he tells us something that's kind of interesting. "*He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.*" The sword of the Lord in Scripture is always pictured as the Word of God. That's one thing we see in the time of Epiphany...how Jesus teaches with power and how the people were amazed. We'll see that in the coming weeks in the Gospel. When Jesus taught the Word of God, the people were amazed at how he taught as one who had authority, not like the teachers of the Law who were just repeating what they heard others say. They were just kind of like the pigeons I also warn our confirmation classes not to be. They were just repeating what they heard. But Jesus taught with authority and with power.

"He made my mouth like a sharpened sword." "He made me into a polished arrow." That makes sense, but the phrases that go with that, they seem kind of odd. If he's a sharpened sword, it seems like he would want everyone to know it. Yet it says, "*in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.*" Doesn't that seem kind of odd? Doesn't it seem like God would want this sharpened sword and this polished arrow to be out there everywhere? But that's not how God did it, is it? "He hid me." God became flesh. When you walked down the street, you weren't blinded by the brilliance of Jesus in his full divinity because he looked like every other human being. "*In the shadow of his hand he hid me; and concealed me in his quiver.*"

For 30 years we don't know an awful lot about Jesus, do we? He was named. The presentation of Jesus...we celebrated the minor Festival on January 1. When he was 12, he was in the temple. We know about that. Then we don't know much of anything

about him until he was 30, right? God concealed him. He was busy carrying out our salvation by obeying the Law perfectly in our place, but not in a way that was demonstrated for everyone yet. But after his Baptism, God pulled that arrow out of the quiver, right? And he let that sword loose. Then Jesus began teaching and doing miracles so that everyone could see he was the divine Messiah. It might surprise us, but that's how the Lord works. The Lord doesn't work in ways that we think are right. He works in ways that he knows are right. That's not always the way we think. That should be obvious to us by now.

Did you catch what the Messiah said? Here's Jesus, 700 years before he was born, saying, *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all."* Does that surprise you? Does it catch you off guard? Does it make you stop and wonder? If you are digging deep into Scripture as you read through your Bible, that's the kind of thing that will make you stop and pause when you figure out who is talking. But when you stop and pause and think about it a little bit, it starts to make an awful lot of sense, doesn't it?

Here is Jesus, sent to the lost sheep of Israel. His ministry was among God's own people, his chosen. His heart went out to them and he had compassion on them and he reached out to them again and again. He would do things because his heart went out to them. Like the 5,000 that were there and there was no Piggly Wiggly around, so he feeds them. He takes care of his physical needs. So deep is his love for them. And what is their response? They want to make him an earthly king, a bread king. He says, "I am the bread of life that has come down from heaven. Anyone that eats my flesh (which means to believe in me), will have eternal life." From that time on people turned away from him because that teaching was too hard to accept that he was the only key to heaven. They didn't care about heaven. They wanted their bellies full.

"I labored to no purpose; I spent my strength in vain and for nothing." He spent three years, invested three years into these 12 guys, teaching them, taking them away and teaching them, letting them see all these things. What does it get him? He gets one that sees 30 pieces of silver and gets those wide eyes and says, "You betch ya! That sounds like a deal." He gets out in the garden and says, "Guys, just watch with me, pray with me for this hour." And they fall asleep.

"I've labored for nothing, no purpose, and I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing." Then when the 12 are finally all gathered around him, one of them is leading a mob and they have swords and spears and torches like they are chasing Frankenstein or something, and they come after him, and the 11 run off and leave him.

"I've labored to no purpose; I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing." Even when he is enduring the very agony of hell on the cross, what did he cry out? "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" "I've labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."

In Scripture, God tells us that Jesus was made like us in every way. He was tempted in every way that we are. Isn't this one of the ways we are tempted? We serve the Lord in whatever role he has placed us, in whatever calling we have; as spouse, as parent, as child, as employee, as employer, as friend, as relative, whatever it is. We seek to serve the Lord sometimes in these areas with all of our heart. We look at what we do. "I've labored to no purpose; I've spent my strength in vain and for nothing."

We don't get to see the results we want to see. Our hearts still ache because we see people that we love that want nothing to do with God and therefore, nothing to do with us. There's an emptiness. There's a time when in some small corner of our hearts comes that still, small voice that says, "What's the use? What's the purpose? Why should I keep doing this?"

As we look at this section of Isaiah, the one thing we see is that Jesus had the same thoughts come to his mind. He was made in every way we are, yet Scripture says he was without sin. You and I often follow those temptations with sin against our God. We blame God or we doubt God or we doubt his love or his purpose or shake our fists at him, whatever it is. We cross over into sin very often when those thoughts come into our minds. But in our place and for us, Jesus never did.

Listen to the next verse... *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."* When his eyes were telling him "It's useless. Everything you are doing isn't making a difference", he looked to God and said, *"Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."* That's the trust of the Servant in God's plan. Going to his humanity, he looked at times and saw things and said, "I don't get it. Why isn't it working? Why aren't they listening?" Yet in his humanity as well, he trusted that God would bring about God's results in God's time.

Listen to his trust. Imitate his trust. Find strength in knowing that he was tempted just like you are, yet he didn't sin. For all those times that you have sinned, for all those times that you and I doubt God or get mad at God or blame God or all these other things that we will do at times because we are sinful, Jesus didn't do it. Now through faith in Jesus, that he is your Savior, when God looks at you, he doesn't see those sins. He sees Jesus' perfect trust in him in your place. That's pretty amazing.

This discussion that takes place between Jesus and the Father 700 years before he was born shows us the Servant's trust. It also shows us what God's plan was. It was beyond what many people would have imagined. At the very beginning of what I read to you, in verse 1 it says, *"Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations."* If you are married, did your spouse ever give you that look where you know you better listen to what they are saying next? That's what this is in Hebrew. When it says "Listen to me you nations," it's saying, "Pay attention to this. Put down the newspaper. Set aside your computer and listen to what I'm saying right now because I'm trying to get

your attention.” When God says, *“Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations,”* what they would have sat up and listened to at first would have seemed to be the same old thing...Israel, Jacob, coming back to God and all those things.

Then he goes on to say, *“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.”* Here is where those distant nations, those islands, would have sat up and listened and it would have thrilled their hearts, just like it did with Paul and Barnabas in our Second Lesson when it said the Gentiles are so excited to hear when Paul and Barnabas quoted that verse... *“I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”* The Messiah was coming, not just for the lost sheep of Israel. He was also coming for the entire world. The same thing John the Baptist said in our Gospel today.

“To him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,” to Jesus, who at times said, *“I’ve labored to no purpose; I’ve spent my strength in vain and for nothing,”* *“despised and abhorred by the nation,”* the Israelites rejected him, *“to the servant of rulers,”* the Lord says to Jesus, *“Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”* He says *“Even though it feels like at times that no one is listening, there will be a day when princes will bow down to you and kings will rise up to you.”* That’s going to come through you and me sharing the Gospel and bringing the Gospel to the nations. That’s going to come as you and I carry out the task with the same trust that the Servant has, when we trust that God’s Word will work even though our eyes don’t always see it work.

Even though sometimes when we are going out to share the Gospel with others and it feels like we are on that thin ice and it’s going to break underneath, we need to trust that God will do the work. God will accomplish his purposes. God will bless the Word of God that we share with others. It will build us up. The Spirit may use it to bring them to faith. But in all things, God will be glorified as we carry out the task which God has called us to do. That’s to share it, not only with ourselves, but with those who don’t yet believe so that they may know that their sins are forgiven and that Christ came as a light to remove the darkness of their sin.