



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

January 15, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

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

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 45

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

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

The Light Spreads throughout the World

- (1) Jesus is a _____ of _____
- (2) In _____ things are _____
- (3) _____ and _____ the Gospel _____

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

While my wife and I were traveling the last few weeks, we were reminded a little bit more about some of the things that had happened in the last couple years with Covid. For our flights from here to Japan, to Bangkok, we had to wear masks the whole time. You could kind of see in different places how different people still handled the pandemic and the effects of Covid.

One of the things that I still remember pretty vividly from that time was something that I think had affected our world quite a bit. When things started to lock down they talked about "essential" jobs. They said some jobs were more essential than others. These people should stay home and not work and these people need to work. While there is some truth to that, we really, really need some jobs; I think that causes people to think a little bit differently when you're told "You're not essential. You're not really valued."

There are different things that people value in this world. There are a lot of questions as to why people value it. Think of paper—some paper is pretty worthless. You can buy it for a couple cents or pennies. But other paper, because it has some color on it and a president's face on it, it's worth a lot of money. What we value depends on how we see it. Someone might give you a gift and that person is special to you and while that thing might not be worth much to other people, to you it's very special.

When we look at Jesus and His work, we are going to see He is valued in different ways. Why is that? We are going to see through Isaiah that He tells us a little bit about His work and what He is going to do and how people react. We saw that in all our other readings, but we're going to see that as He goes out, we see this **Light that spreads throughout the world**. We'll look at a little bit of what His work was and why there are different opinions about that. Then also how we can react and help and share about that Savior.

When Isaiah writes in this section, there is this interesting peek that we get into a conversation between God the Father and God the Son. The Father talks about how this Word or this work is going to go out because He says, ***Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations...*** He is talking first to the people here but also to the people far away. ***“Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name. 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. He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”*** Notice here the Lord is talking and speaking about what He is going to do. He first says that He is a Servant. This is going to be His work—a Servant.

Later it talks about what God will make Him into. In [Verse 6](#), ***“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”*** Jesus is spoken about here/the Messiah is spoken about here as a *Servant of Light*. He is one who is going to go out and work and share this Light. He talks some about what His work will be and how He is going to share that Light. Where He says, ***He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me...*** He is going to have this Word, the sharp sword that goes out. The Bible talks about how the Word of God is living and active and it cuts deep.

Think about the ways we think about a servant. We don't have a ton of servants in the way that there used to be but I think being a servant and serving others has always kind of been looked down on, maybe not valued that much. But it is important work. We know that Jesus was the Servant. He left heaven to become one of us and to serve, not to have other people serve Him, but to serve the world; to bring salvation and light to the world. Notice that people don't always see that and recognize it. In [Verse 4](#) He says, ***“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.”*** Many people didn't realize what Jesus was doing/what the Messiah was going to do, but His work was so important.

This section here can be a little bit confusing because it talks about Israel several times. He says in [Verse 3](#), ***“You are my servant, Israel...”*** But then later in [Verse 5](#) it talks about how ***he formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself...*** This work of the Servant was to be that replacement; to

serve and fulfill the work that Israel could not do. Israel had all these covenants and they were supposed to be faithful to God, and what did they do? They failed time after time, much like we do. We know we need this Servant to fulfill the things that we cannot do, to be our replacement, to suffer and die in our place. But notice many people don't like that or don't want that.

Jesus/the Messiah talks about where He felt like He labored in vain. In a lot of the other readings we had, especially in Acts, how do people react to that message? They despised it. They didn't want to hear the preaching of the Gospel and about the Light that this Servant would bring? Why is that?

Have you ever been in a place where you don't like the light? This actually happened to us while traveling. When you are jetlagged a little bit, sometimes when you are actually sleeping, you don't want any light. But one of the rooms we were in when we just arrived at one place, it was 11pm-midnight when we arrived and we got some food, so we were up late. This new hotel did not have dark curtains so we were actually finally sleeping and here the light comes shining through early in the morning and we just wanted to sleep. We didn't like the light. When you are in the darkness, sometimes you don't like the light at all.

When you are *in darkness things are different*. I think this is an important thing to think about. When we are looking at how the Light goes out into the world, many people are in darkness. They have been told over and over again that things are different. "This is how the world works" or "There is no hope." "It's all up to you. There is no Savior." "You are your own Savior." "You are your own God. Just make things how you want." "Work as hard as you can and that's all that matters." That's darkness. Darkness leads them to be further in that darkness and not want that Light because they've been told over and over again that "Light is no good. Stay in that darkness."

During the Partnering in the Gospel seminars that we do, one of the questions that we ask is what does a growing church or a church that is doing evangelism look like? Another question we ask is do people understand unbelievers? Do people understand those who aren't Christians? The conversations are pretty interesting but I think it's a good thing for us to think about. How well or how do we understand those people who are not in the Word? For some of us who have always been in the Light, who are parents or grandparents and everyone brought us up in the Light of the Gospel, it's very hard for us to understand why or how someone could believe and do these things. So how hard is it for us to share and to witness to them if I can't understand why they might think that way?

I think a second part of this is to also understand why they are in darkness. I think a lot of them have been pushed there or were brought there by others and have been deceived. They have not really had the true Light given to them. So when we

understand that in some ways they have really been deceived, they don't have the truth, they don't have the Light, they aren't in the Light the way that we are, instead of being angry or thinking "How could those people believe that or think that way," maybe we can have compassion. As we reach out and we share, we can seek to understand and share in this loving way and not as much of a confrontational way of "How could you think this way?" We can share that we know we have something special and joyful and we can thank God for the Light that we do have.

I also want us to think about for us, when the darkness comes. When you are in difficult times and you're being led in one way or to think in one way. We, as Christians, have the Light but aren't there times that the darkness and the things of this world, the things that we face, they try to pull us away from the Light and tell us it's wrong or there is no good in that and slowly and slowly we can drift away from the Light. So we need what? We need the Word that goes out, as He talks about that "quiver" and "polished arrow" that is going to come out and remind us of the truth and the Light, to restore us. That's the story of Israel over and over again. They came to God and they knew of His Word and His truth and then they drifted. But God continually went back to them. And here we see the clear message that it's not them but it's about Jesus and the work that He did.

Notice then one of the keys to this whole message that Isaiah gives us. It's where this Light goes out to. In [Verse 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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." This is what the LORD says—the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "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."*** Notice then what is to happen. This Light is not just for us or for the Jews but this Light is to go out into the world.

One of the neatest things during my traveling was the meetings that I was at. That's the main reason that I was gone—to attend some missionary meetings that are doing work in Asia. I work with the program [316NOW](#) that does online education to Asians. During our meetings, one of the things that the group was doing was coming together to finesse or get the right wording for what they are there to do. A lot of the people in that room are missionaries, but the work has changed so much that they are not the ones that are there, out talking to people every day. They are the ones that are training people that are of the same nationality who are going to go out and share. They came to this understanding of what their work was or how to describe it. They said one of the key things is that their work is to multiply and amplify the Light of the Gospel.

If you notice what is talked about here, I think that's one of the things that we can focus on as well—to multiply and amplify the Gospel Light in the world because here it talks about how the Word of God is going to go out into all the world. How many of you/how many of us are going to go out into the world, to all the far reaches of the world? A lot of us don't travel much outside of Wisconsin, and that's okay, but what can you do? How can you do this—to be a light and to share that Gospel Light that is going to go out into the world?

I think we see it with the Gospel Lesson where Andrew hears about this Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and then he follows. But then what does he do as he has found his Savior? The first thing he does—I think it's important that it is written. The first thing he does is go and tell his brother. Who is his brother? Simon Peter, the rock of the church, the foundation of that group of disciples who is going to go and be this great missionary. It wasn't Peter who first found Jesus. It was Andrew.

So what can we do? We can just share our light—to share the message of the Savior with those around us. I think that starts in our homes—parents with your kids; spouses together. One of the cool things, if you saw on Facebook and Instagram, is there is a picture of four seniors from Martin Luther College. There is actually one more who will be a fifth-year senior next year. So we have five students at MLC who are there saying “I want to be a light for the Gospel as my job.” How do you think they got there? Who encouraged them? People here in this church, in their homes and maybe their teachers or other people that knew them and saw the gifts that they had and said “I think you would be good at this.” I think we have more of those people in our church now— young people who can do that work and share that Gospel Light in the world. Who knows where God will send them? But that's not the only way.

I want to make it clear that YOU can do this now, not just in encouraging people to be in the ministry but one of the greatest things is just sharing and being a light to those around you. You maybe aren't going to travel very far but you can share what you know. You can share about Jesus. That's all Andrew did, was point someone to Jesus. This is what our class is that Pastor is starting with the God's Great Exchange and some of what we talk about in our Partnering in the Gospel, how just in the little ways you can be that light. But one of the cool things about this is to multiply and amplify the Light. We want to share and make more light but we also, in our ways, want to show that we value Jesus.

We talked about what is important. When you are here on a Sunday morning or a Thursday night, you are showing what is important in your life. You are amplifying that Light. When you follow God's Word when the rest of the world doesn't want to or doesn't think it's important, you amplify that Light. You don't know who you share with just by how you live or those words of comfort and grace when someone is in darkness, who maybe you share with and then they share with someone else, and that's how that

light grows—one person at a time. You know of who Jesus is and what He has done for you. You know that He is the Servant who redeems you, who forgives you, who loves you, who has pulled you out of darkness into the Light. So what joy we have to be a light, to be a light in this world that is so filled with darkness. Much like the moon, we know that it's not our light but we are just reflecting that Light that the Savior gives. What a joy it is to point people, not to ourselves and how great we are but to point people to Jesus, the perfect Son of God; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.