

January 15, 2017

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-6

The Servant of the Lord Bears Testimony to His Mission

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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Those things that qualify a representative to carry out a task we call credentials. The root of that word means trusting, to believe in. Credentials are proof of identify. They are the bona fides that make us accept someone's authority to carry out a task. For example, an ambassador of the United States presents his or her credentials to the officials of the country where they will represent our countries' interests.

Just such a representative spoke through the prophet Isaiah about eight centuries before he began his work. Not only had he spoken. The one who would send him also put in a word to describe the mission. Epiphany is about that ambassador, his credentials, and his mission. Epiphany is about the Servant of the Lord. The mission would be so great that it would not be limited to one place or to one group of people.

Jesus Christ is the Servant of the Lord. Through Isaiah, **the Servant of the Lord Bears Testimony to His Mission.** He is divinely called and his mission is from God. His mission is to bring back Israel and be a light to the Gentiles.

The eternal Son of God speaks in way that indicates his work is an accomplished fact. There could be no doubt among the prophets' original readers that the Servant of the Lord had the credentials to be the world's Savior, or that he would do the work for which the Lord had sent him. That is the beauty and the power of the prophetic Word. As we sing, "We have a sure prophetic word, by inspiration of the Lord. And though assailed on every hand, Jehovah's word shall ever stand." CW 291 s.1

What are Jesus' credentials, his bona fides, to be the Servant of the Lord? He tells us Gentiles, whom he refers to as "you islands, you distant nations," "Listen to me... hear this," literally, pay close attention. His credentials are that from eternity, even before he was born of Mary, the Father had called him to be the One who would buy back the lost world from sin, death, and the power of the devil. "From my mother's womb he has spoken my name."

Our Savior's name, Jesus, is the Father's presentation of his Son's credentials. Jesus is the one who saves his people from their sins. The Lord's servant's says the Lord gave him the name "Israel." Israel means, he struggles with the Lord.

It was a name God first gave to Jacob in the desert after wrestling with the Son of God. It was the name he gave his people. It was the name the Lord later would give to his Son because his nation failed to display his splendor. The Son would struggle with the Father to display God's splendor that is his gracious sending of the promised Messiah to become the cursed so we could be the reconciled.

The Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, is divinely called and his mission is from God. Those are our Savior's credentials. The Father and the Spirit presented those credentials to the world as Jesus' baptism. Those credentials endowed Jesus even as a true man with the authority and the power he needed to represent his Father.

Jesus would speak for the Father with a mouth, or words, that would be "like a sharpened sword" and a "polished arrow." The Servant of the Lord's office, or mission, was to proclaim the Word of God. His words would cut to the heart and pierce the soul. Those words are the gospel

that create a new heart of faith in Jesus; faith in Jesus that would manifest itself in works of love toward our neighbors. His mission is to bring back Israel and be a light to the Gentiles.

Jesus speaks of the sword being sheathed and the arrow in the quiver. The servant of the Lord would be hidden for a time until the Lord revealed him. And, he would be hidden under his human flesh and blood. The Lord revealed his servant by the words of Jesus' mouth when after his baptism he began to preach publicly. He told the hearers in the synagogue of Nazareth, "Today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The Lord revealed his servant under flesh and blood when Jesus did miracles. Jesus' glory as the Lord's servant was hidden under flesh and blood on the cross but revealed when Jesus rose from the dead in triumph over sin and the grave.

There were times in his mission when Jesus felt "I have labored in vain." He says, "I have spent my strength for nothing at all." In the weakness of his humanity, Jesus was burdened by our sins and guilt. He had to face the shame and the pain of the cross. But he scorned those. Jesus set aside his feelings.

Instead, Jesus looked forward to the joy that awaited him in his new life in the resurrection. Rather than sin by listening to and following his feelings, Jesus clung to the will of his Father. He committed himself to carrying out his mission of giving you his victory as a free gift. He would live to ascend into heaven and send the Holy Spirit to the church as he had promised.

The speaker follows who is the Lord who sent his servant. The Lord had formed his servant in Mary's womb to call back his own people. Jesus' primary work was to call the nation of Israel to repentance and faith. The servant's mouth did call back the remnant of believers God had kept. That was not enough. Such a great mission was too great to be limited to one people at one time. The Lord said, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

We sing about that mission virtually every Sunday. Jesus Christ is the glory of his people Israel and a light for revelation to the Gentiles. The mission of forgiveness and salvation is too great to have any limitations. We heard last Sunday God does not show favoritism in the Son's redemptive work. Through Isaiah we hear the Lord, and his Servant, the Lord, describe the credentials Jesus had for that work and the extent of the success of his saving work.

We may at times feel as if we labor in our Christian faith for nothing. Set those feelings aside and cling instead to the sure victory our Father declares in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Trust in Jesus' credentials; called by God and sent by God. Rely on the extent of his mission, a mission even including you. Listen, pay close attention. There is no reason to doubt this sure prophetic Word. Amen. <SDG>

