

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan

January 19, 2014

Isaiah 49:1-7

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. 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." 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." 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." 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 rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Do you own anything which is well used? Maybe it is a pair of garden gloves. They once were brand new leather gloves, but now when you look at them they are worn out with big holes in them. Maybe it is a baseball glove. You've had it for years and many ball games. Now, it is old and worn out. The padding which once protected your hand is gone and whenever the ball hits the palm of your glove it hurts because there is only leather between your hand and the ball.

Perhaps it is an old cook book. It has been with you many years and helped you prepare many good meals. However, it is starting to become well used. There are stains on the pages from your many times using it. Some of the pages are torn. The binding is starting to crack. It has seen better days. What is on your list of well-worn objects? It might be something I listed or it could be a car, boots, jeans, sled, tent, shirt and the list goes on.

Well used is another aspect of Isaiah's description about God's servant. We were introduced to this servant last week. Last week we saw how God's servant, Jesus, is God's determined yet gentle servant. We saw how Jesus was determined to carry out God's mission here on earth, but he wouldn't be harsh carrying out his task. He carried out his task with a gentle attitude which cared about others. Today, we see that God's servant has another side to him. Today, we see God's servant is his well-used servant.

What makes Jesus God's well-used servant? There are three things God's servant is well used to do. He is used to speak God's Word. He is used to display God's splendor. He is used to bring back all of God's people. First, we will look at how God's servant is well used to speak God's Word. **"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."**

"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." The first thing God's servant is well used to do is proclaim God's Word here on earth. God's servant himself tells us this in verse one. **"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."**

One of Jesus' specific missions and goals here on earth was to share God's Word here on earth. Think about it this way: Jesus was literally born to share God's Word with us. This means every time Jesus teaches us something here on earth it means God himself is teaching us. Jesus loves and cares about us enough to come into our world and experience our world for himself. He loves and cares for us so much left his throne in heaven behind so he could come speak to us directly.

The fact Jesus came and spoke to us directly is wonderful, but what does it practically mean for us? What good are his words for us? **"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."** God promises us the word of his servant is able to cut into its enemies like a sharpened sword or strike them like a polished arrow.

How can God's word cut like a sword or strike like an arrow? God promises us that his word is living, active and powerful. It has the power to change hearts. It has the ability to raise spiritually dead people

to life. It gains this power and ability to do these things from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supplies the power to raise spiritually dead people and transform their hearts. The only way he can do this is by using the words of God's well-used servant.

I want us to think back to my introduction. I talked about things which are well used. What happened to all the things which I mentioned that were well used? They broke down. They wore out. Their use destroyed them. Compare this to God's servant and what happens when he is well used. **"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."**

God's well used servant is sharp. He is polished. He won't break down. The best part about this servant is the more we use him the sharper he will become. This is the opposite of things in this world. How so? The more we use things in this world it seems the more they break down. The more we use old garden gloves the sooner we have to throw them away. The more we use an old baseball glove the more we want a new one. By comparison, the more we use God's servant the sharper he drives our point home.

How is it possible that the more we use a tool the sharper it drives a point home? This brings us to our next point about God's well-used servant. He is used to display God's splendor. **"He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.' 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.'"**

God displays his splendor through the words and actions of his servant. We might not always be able to see this splendor because God's servant himself didn't always see it. God's servant says, **"I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."** There are times Jesus felt this way. Numerous people turned their back on him. Many people rejected him and his teaching. He was forced to suffer and die. All of these things made it feel like his mission on earth was a failure.

These rejections and his suffering made him feel like his mission was a failure, but God's servant knew better. Why did he know better and realize he wasn't a failure? He knows he is God's well-used servant who is carrying out God's will with his actions here on earth. **"Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God.' He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.'"**

What was the splendor God would display through Jesus? **"The next day John saw Jesus said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.'"**

God's splendor was displayed by Jesus when he gave his life for the sins of the world. Jesus' sacrifice for our sins and his resurrection from the dead were the main goals of his life. These two events would bring God splendor and glory. Jesus' death would pay for and forgive all of our sins. Jesus' resurrection

assures us God has accepted Jesus' payment for our sins. They also bring us to our third point that God's well-used servant will be used to bring back all God's people.

“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.’”

“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 rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.’” God promises his well-used servant is for all people here on earth. He isn't for a select few, but the sharpness of his word and the glory of his splendor is for people from all nations.

We see this promise fulfilled in our second reading today. **“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.’”**

“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.” Paul and Barnabas show us how God's well-used servant brought people from all nations into God's kingdom. It is a wonderful encouragement for us to do the same.

We all have things in our lives which are well used. We have garden gloves which we have worn out. We have baseball gloves with no padding. We have cook books that are more like a collection of pages rather than a book. I hope God's servant is also well-used in our homes. I hope he is used to speak God's Word to us so we can see his splendor. This splendor will help bring us back to his love and faithfulness. It will also help bring others to him as well. Amen.