

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

**January 12, 2014**

**Isaiah 42:1-7**

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope." This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.*

Do you ever use the words determined and gentle to describe the same person? I must confess I usually don't picture the same person as both determined yet gentle. I picture people who are determined to be stubborn. They won't move on issues. They bowl people over to get their way. I don't imagine they are gentle. What do gentle people look like? Gentle people are soft spoken. They won't make a big scene to get their way. Gentle people are kind.

I must admit although I don't usually use the words determined and gentle together that it doesn't mean they never go together. When can they go together? I think they go together when a dad is teaching his daughter to ride a bike. She wants to give up, but her dad knows his daughter can ride the bike. A determined yet gentle dad doesn't yell at his daughter, but he gently refuses to let his daughter quit trying since he knows she can do it. The dad is both gentle and determined.

I think a mother can be determined and gentle too. What does she do when her year and a half old son cries and cries because she won't give him his nuk? Does she yell at her son to stop crying? Does she give in and give it back? No. She gently tells her son no. He can't have his nuk back since she is determined to get him off of it. These are two examples I thought of and I'm sure there are many more, but you get my point. Determined and gentle can describe the same person.

Isaiah describes another person who is both determined yet gentle for us today. This person is God's servant. I want you to listen and see if you can pick out how Isaiah describes God's servant as both determined and gentle. **"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."**

**"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope. This is what God the LORD says-- he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it:"**

**"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness."** Did you catch how God's servant is both determined yet gentle? I will read the sections again, but this time I will give you an opportunity to see if you agree with me.

I think these verses describe the determination of God's servant. **"In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth."** God's servant had a specific mission here on earth and he would not falter or be discouraged until he completed this mission here on earth. What is this mission? Isaiah describes it like this, **"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand."**

**"I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in**

**darkness.”** The mission God’s servant was determined to carry out here on earth was to establish justice here on earth. This justice would mean bringing sight to the blind, freeing the captives from prison and releasing from the dark dungeon of sin those who are stuck sitting there.

What kind of spirit would God’s servant be filled with? He would be filled with a spirit of gentleness. This spirit of gentleness would help him with those who are struggling in their faith. **“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”**

God’s servant would deal gently with those struggling in their faith. He would not immediately reject them and snuff them out like a dying candle. He wouldn’t break them off and throw them away like some people do with broken reeds. He would come to them and gently work to increase the flame of their faith. He would come and splint up the reed of their broken spirit. He would do all of these things with a determined gentleness which would not give up on people.

Who is God’s determined yet gentle servant? Jesus. Jesus is God’s determined and gentle servant promised in these verses. Today, we celebrate Jesus’ baptism. Jesus’ baptism was God’s public proclamation that Jesus was his chosen servant to bring his new covenant into the world. Our gospel lesson shows us this proclamation about Jesus. **“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.”**

**“At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”** These words show us God publicly telling the people that Jesus is his chosen servant who is filled with both determination and gentleness. Jesus will show us both of these sides during the season of Epiphany.

Jesus will show us his gentle side during this Epiphany season by the way he deals with the poor and those run down by the side effects of sin. His gentle side fills him with compassion. It will lead him to drive out demons. It will lead him to heal people of diseases. It will lead him to comfort the hurting and the lost. It will lead him to share the good news of salvation and the new covenant of God’s love and peace for the people.

Jesus will also show us his determined side. There were many chances for Jesus to lose this determination. People wanted him to be their earthly king who would free them not from the dungeon of sin, but rather the rule of Rome. There were people who persecuted and threatened him. There were people who called him a fake and a liar. All of these people tried to distract him and prevent him from reaching his goal. What was this goal he was so determined to reach?

**“In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon**

**those who sit in darkness.”** Jesus goal was to create and establish God’s new covenant in this world. This covenant could only be established one way. He needed to give his life to create it.

God’s new covenant of peace could happen only by the shedding of his servant’s blood. Jesus needed to shed his blood to free us from darkness of sin and the prison house of our sin. We couldn’t have gotten out of this dark prison on our own. We needed Jesus to free us. Winning our freedom is what gave Jesus his strong determination. Jesus knew if he lost focus and determination to reach his goal for even one second that it would be disaster for us. His failure would mean we would be sent to hell forever.

Jesus did not fail. He did not lose focus. He kept our salvation before him at all times and brought God’s justice into this world. **“In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”**

Jesus’ determination has freed us from our sin and his gentle gospel has called us to be his servants. Now, he wants us to show the same determination and gentleness towards others. Do you know anyone whose faith is barely hanging on like a sputtering wick? Do you know anyone whose faith has become a bruised reed which is in danger of breaking off? Jesus is calling us today to deal with these people in a determined yet gentle way.

What does these sputtering wicks and bruised reeds look like? They look like people who offer up excuses about something someone at church said or did to keep them away from God’s house. They look like people who can be every other place in the world on Sunday but in church. They look like people who are struggling with guilt about past sins. They look like people who are convinced God loves them because of something in addition to what Jesus has done for them.

Sputtering wicks and bruised reeds aren’t always fun to talk to. The excuses they offer up can frustrate us. This frustration can lead to anger. It can make us want to shake them and yell, “What are you doing? Get your act together. Don’t you know your relationship with God is the most important thing you have in this world?” This frustration can also lead us to give up. It makes us want to lick our thumb and douse out the sputtering wick or rip up the bruised reed and throw it away.

However, is this what God wants? No. He wants us to show a determined yet gentle spirit to these people. **“(They) will not shout or cry out, or raise (their) voice(s) in the streets. A bruised reed (they) will not break, and a smoldering wick (they) will not snuff out.”** God wants us to show love to these people. He wants us to encourage them and build up their bruised faith. He wants us to fan a flickering wick of faith into flame. He wants us to do this with a gentle determination which reflects his love. Amen.