



Sermon: WELS Walking Together (Advent 1) - Pastor Todd Goldschmidt

Sunday 10:15 am – November 27th, 2011 – At [Living Hope Lutheran Church](#)

Sermon Study on Isaiah 49:1-6

Verse 1 - Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.

The speaker calls on the islands and distant nations, showing that God wants the gospel proclaimed beyond Israel (cf. Is. 24:15, 42:4, & 60:9). Islands and distant nations could be 2 separate groups, one nearer and the other farther, or parallelism. In either case, we think of ourselves, living far beyond the land of Old Testament Israel, and we think of the nations on the other side of the earth from us, particularly in China, the African continent and the countries of Southeast Asia. The speaker is Christ, identified in verse five as the Servant who is "to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself." It's a great comfort to know that God's plan of salvation was carefully planned since before the world began, not something haphazard and thrown together as God went along. Jesus had his name spoken by our heavenly Father from before birth as the one not just to speak the Word of God but to be the Word of God made flesh. He knew what his mission was. Our young people who present themselves to train for the ministry of the gospel give prayerful consideration to future service in the church. They're not always sure of how the Lord will use them or where he will send them to serve. But they trust His plan.

Verse 2 - 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 sword of the mouth of the speaker is the Word of God. A similar expression is, "Let me make myself perfectly clear." (cf. Heb. 4:12 for more on the sword imagery). The Word of the Lord is clear, no matter what language it's translated into. Christ was "hidden and concealed" in his state of humiliation, when, according to his Father's will, he gave up the full use of his divine attributes. But he's still sharp and polished, carrying out his Father's will perfectly.

Verse 3 - He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."

Jesus is called a servant because he fulfills his Father's will. He says to his Father, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4). He's called Israel because of the people from whom he will come, because he's specially chosen by his Father (Malachi 1:2-5), and because of his suffering while carrying out the Father's will (Matt. 26:42). God displays his splendor as he uses Word & sacrament to bring people of all nations to saving faith.

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Verse 4 - 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.”

The steps of the humiliation—conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried—only begin to capture the long labor of our Savior on our behalf. He even experienced the temptation to despair (Luke 12:50), but he did not sin. He did not falter or become discouraged (2 Cor. 4:8-9). The Messiah is an example for every person who speaks the Word of God. Our work as a synod doesn’t always show immediate rewards. But God promises that his Word won’t return to him empty. As his servants, we trust that our work in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Verses 5 & 6 - 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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

Even though Jesus has a difficult task, he calls himself honored. Our pastors, teachers, and missionaries have difficult tasks, but they consider it an honor to serve the Lord in the way that the church asks them. The work of the Lord, the mission of the church, is to take the word of salvation to the ends of the earth. The Savior is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32).



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Jesus Is the Light of the World—The Light No Darkness Can Overcome!

In a good spy novel or engaging espionage movie, an international power sometimes possesses a secret, invincible weapon. If all else fails, it can release the weapon against its enemies. While the victor may suffer setbacks as events unfold, the final outcome is never really in doubt. Isaiah describes the Lord Jesus in similar terms. Jesus was God’s secret, invincible weapon against sin and the powers of darkness. Satan and his demons didn’t know the details of the Lord’s plan to save His people. The Apostle Paul wrote: “We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:7-8). God hid His plan for Jesus, and revealed it at just the right moment in time. There was a party in hell on Good Friday and Holy Saturday. But Satan woke up to a whole different reality on Easter morning: the risen Savior had stripped him of his power and forever broken his stranglehold on sinful mankind. This Conquering Hero is our Servant-Savior and our reigning King!

Our text begins, “Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.” Who’s speaking here? At this point, it’s hard to say. It could be Isaiah, couldn’t it? It could be, but it isn’t. The speaker is identified at the end of our text as the One whom the LORD “formed . . . in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself,” the One made to be “a light for the Gentiles,” so “that [God’s] salvation might reach to the ends of the earth.” The speaker is none other than Jesus Himself! He calls upon the islands and the distant nations to hearken to His message of forgiveness and hope, for it alone is the Word of God; the Word of truth. It’s a great comfort to know that God’s plan of salvation wasn’t just haphazardly thrown together or made up as the LORD went along. It is a plan that was set in stone from before the world’s creation. Jesus had His name spoken by our heavenly Father from before His birth & announced by the angel Gabriel to Joseph as the one “who would save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). The Word of God made flesh knew that His mission was “to destroy the devil’s work” (1 Jn. 3:18).



One of the major upsides of belonging to a church body that still believes that the Bible, in its entirety, is the Spirit-breathed Word of God is knowing that the young people preparing to become pastors and teachers in our Wisconsin Synod are trained by professors who believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they have been entrusted with the sacred duty of making “the secret things of God” clearly understandable to their students. Our young men and women who present themselves to train for the ministry of the gospel—be it preaching or teaching—give prayerful consideration to fulltime, future service in the church of Christ. They have no idea how or where they’ll ultimately end up serving their Savior over the course of their respective ministries. But they know that no matter where they’re assigned, or later called, they have the life-giving, soul-enlightening Word of God as their trusty weapon to wield against the devil and his demons. No other pastors or teachers on the planet are as well-trained as ours in the WELS when it comes to knowing how to employ the sharp, double-edged sword of the Spirit to do the Lord’s work. We have much to be thankful for as the receipts of such Christ-centered training.

Jesus goes on to say of His Heavenly Father, “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 Savior not only spoke the Word of God—He is the Word of God made flesh! And no matter what language His Word is translated into, it’s crystal clear, because it’s *His* Word. Christ’s divinity was “hidden and concealed” in His state of humiliation, when, according to His Father’s will, He gave up the full use of His divine attributes. But He was still sharp and polished, carrying out his Father’s will perfectly. The writer of Hebrews tells us that although Jesus “was tempted in every way, just as we are,” He “was without sin” (4:15). He offered up His sinless life on the cross, and in exchange, He took on the whole load of our sin and guilt. Because He did that, Paul could write: “God made [Jesus], who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus continues to shine through law and gospel even today, and those two chief doctrines of Scripture continue to be the main focus of our worker training system in the WELS. For that, we can be truly grateful! Today there are many colleges and seminaries claiming to be Christian—some that even bear the name “Lutheran”—that no longer believe, teach and confess that the Bible is God’s Word.

The Savior says, “[The LORD] said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’” If anyone in history embodies the spirit of servitude, it’s Jesus. Paul wrote that Jesus: “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:6-8). Jesus said of Himself, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Chosen by the Father from eternity, of the tribe of Judah, He glorified the Father above all by His agonizing suffering and death. In the Upper Room on the night of His arrest, Jesus “looked toward heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do’” John 17:1-3

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Today the Triune God displays His splendor through His Word and the sacred acts of Baptism and Holy Communion to bring people of all nations to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When pastors and teachers from the WELS fan out across the globe, they employ the training they've received in college and at the seminary in the classroom and the pulpit, at the font and at the altar, to proclaim "Christ crucified" as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:23-24). The Holy Spirit works through those sacred means to call more and more of God's elect to trust in Jesus as their Redeemer, for "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). It was extremely difficult for Christ to accomplish His mission. Moment by moment, Satan applied intense pressure to the Savior in a variety of ways: thick-headed disciples, initially unbelieving siblings, skeptics from His own hometown, scorn and ridicule from the leading religious leaders in Israel. Betrayed and abandoned by His closest friends, He ultimately died a bloody death at the hands of the Romans on the altar of the cross.

He laments, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing." The steps of Jesus' humiliation we recite almost every Sunday in the creeds only begin to capture our Lord's long labor of love. Though He wrestled with discouragement in Gethsemane, He did not falter in His effort to finish the work He'd come to do. For "the joy set before him"—the utter joy of winning us for time and eternity—"he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). He knew that "what was due him was in the LORD's hand, and [his] reward is with [his] God." So, after declaring His work complete, He entrusted His spirit to the care of His grateful Father and breathed His last pre-resurrected breath. Three days later, He rose again from the dead, having destroyed all of our spiritual enemies.

When we become disheartened in our efforts to live for the Lord, the Bible encourages us to "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that [we] do not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:3). That advice holds true above all for fulltime called workers in God's harvest field. In fact, the Messiah is an example for every person who speaks the Word of God. Our work as a synod doesn't always show immediate results. Nor do our own outreach efforts as individuals or as a congregation. But just as persistence paid off in Jesus' case, so it does in ours as well. God pledges that His Word "will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what [He] desires and achieve the purpose for which [He] sends it" (Is. 55:10-11)—whether that purpose is to convict or to pardon, to instruct or to inspire, to bless or to curse. In view of our final victory over death on the Last Day, the Apostle Paul writes to us as faithful servants of the Savior: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).



Jesus is the light of the world, the Light no darkness can overcome! He continues to shine to the ends of the earth, whenever and wherever His enlightening Word is faithfully proclaimed. And so He concludes our text for today, by saying: “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 make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth.’” Nothing gave Jesus greater honor than to serve as His Father’s appointed, Spirit-anointed, Savior of the world—nothing!

So to this day, the risen, reigning Savior has commissioned us to “go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). We can’t complete that mission by ourselves. But we can share that good news with countless souls across the globe through the combined efforts of our brothers and sisters in the Wisconsin Synod as we walk together and work together to equip and send pastors, teachers and missionaries as fellow ambassadors to the farthest corners of the earth. That’s the work of the Lord; that’s the mission of His Church, for Jesus will always be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of [God’s] people Israel” (Lk. 2:32). May sharing His light always remain our one true aim! To that end, we keep up our efforts to share our Savior with others through our personal testimony, through our offerings sent in to the synod to support to the training and sending of future called workers, and through our ongoing prayers for protection, perseverance & peace for our pastors, teachers and missionaries, as well as their families and the flocks that have been entrusted to their care. Amen.