

# Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

January 19, 2020 | Epiphany 2A

## *Collect for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany*

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen. ~BCP  
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## **Isaiah 49:1-7 NRSV**

<sup>1</sup> Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. <sup>2</sup> He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. <sup>3</sup> And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." <sup>4</sup> But I said, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the LORD, and my reward with my God."

<sup>5</sup> And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength— <sup>6</sup> he says, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

<sup>7</sup> Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, "Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

## **1 Corinthians 1:1-9 NRSV**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

<sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

## **John 1:29-42 NRSV**

<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" <sup>30</sup> This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' <sup>31</sup> I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup> And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." <sup>33</sup> I myself did not know him, but the one who sent

me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup> And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

<sup>35</sup> The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, <sup>36</sup> and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. <sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" <sup>39</sup> He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>40</sup> One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. <sup>41</sup> He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). <sup>42</sup> He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

## Psalm 29 BCP 620

- 1 I waited patiently upon the Lord; \* he stooped to me and heard my cry.
- 2 He lifted me out of the desolate pit, out of the mire and clay; \*  
he set my feet upon a high cliff and made my footing sure.
- 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;\*  
many shall see, and stand in awe, and put their trust in the Lord.
- 4 Happy are they who trust in the Lord! \* they do not resort to evil spirits or turn to false gods.
- 5 Great things are they that you have done, O Lord my God! how great your wonders and your  
plans for us! \* there is none who can be compared with you.
- 6 Oh, that I could make them known and tell them! \* but they are more than I can count.
- 7 In sacrifice and offering you take no pleasure \* (you have given me ears to hear you);
- 8 Burnt-offering and sin-offering you have not required, \* and so I said, "Behold, I come.
- 9 In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: \*  
'I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart.'"
- 10 I proclaimed righteousness in the great congregation; \*  
behold, I did not restrain my lips; and that, O Lord, you know.
- 11 Your righteousness have I not hidden in my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your  
deliverance; \* I have not concealed your love and faithfulness from the great congregation.
- 12 You are the Lord; do not withhold your compassion from me; \*  
let your love and your faithfulness keep me safe for ever.

January 19, 2020 | Epiphany 2A  
SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

*The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my  
mother's womb he named me.*

Isaiah 49:1 NRSV



## Commentary on Isaiah 49:1-7. Pastoral Perspective.

*By Stephanie A. Paulsell, Houghton Professor of the Practice of Ministry Studies, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

In the first of Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isa. 42:1-9), it is God's voice we hear: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights" (Isa. 42:1). The first Servant Song celebrates the patient, nonviolent, merciful ministry of the Servant who "faithfully bring[s] forth justice" without breaking a "bruised reed" or quenching "a dimly burning wick" (Isa. 42:3). "The coastlands," God sings in the first of the Servant Songs, "wait for his teaching" (Isa. 42:4).

In the second Servant Song, we hear the Servant's own voice, singing toward those same coastlands, calling to "peoples from far away" (v. 1). To these strangers living far off, the Servant sings a song about the unfolding of a remarkable vocation.

Whose vocation is it? As with the first Servant Song, there is considerable scholarly debate about the identity of the Servant in this passage. The Servant quotes God as saying, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (v. 3), which seems straightforward enough. There is textual evidence, however, that the designation, Israel, was an addition to the original text. This has led some scholars to seek the identity of the Servant in individual historical figures rather in the community of God's people.

The pastoral impact of this text is not dependent, however, upon a definitive answer to the question of the identity of the Servant. As biblical scholar Paul Hanson has put it, "the Servant is both faithful individual and obedient community." The call of God that the Servant describes, while powerful, is not unique to any historical figure. The psalmist also sings of being known by God before birth (Ps. 139:13), and God tells the prophet Jeremiah, "Before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer. 1:5). God never ceases calling, the psalmist tells us; God "speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting" (Ps. 50:1). The call of God about which the Servant sings is a call that comes to the beloved people of Israel, to the earth itself, and to each of us, in the specificity of our own lives.

The Servant sings a song of God's call in four parts. The first part echoes stories of God's call like the ones described above. God called me from before I was born, the Servant sings. God hid me, polished me, tucked me away in his quiver. "You are my servant," God says, "in whom I will be glorified" (v. 3). The Servant has been prepared by God for nothing less than to bring the glory of God into view through the restoration of Israel. No wonder we are reading this text during Epiphany, when the glory of the Lord shines all around us.

The next movement of this song, however, describes the Servant's failure to live up to this calling, a story of wasted time and spinning wheels. "I have labored in vain," the Servant admits. All the strength God gave me, the Servant grieves, I spent "for nothing and vanity" (v. 4).

In spite of his failures, hope still lives in the heart of the Servant. Even though the Servant has worked without result and used God's gifts for vain purposes, he remembers God's call; God's high purposes still reach him. God called me "to bring Jacob back to him ... that Israel might be gathered to him" (v. 5). The Servant knows who he is and with whom his loyalties lie. "Surely my cause is with the Lord," the Servant sings, "and my reward with my God" (v. 4).

It is the Servant's memory of the mighty work of reconciliation to which God has called him that opens a space in which the Servant can once again hear God's voice. When God speaks again, God not only renews the Servant's original calling but enlarges the scope of it, so that it encompasses not only the restoration of Israel but the salvation of every nation on earth. Rather than looking upon

the Servant's failures and adjusting the call downwards to meet diminished expectations, God says to the Servant,

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (v. 6)

The vocation to which I first called you, God seems to say, is not everything I want from you. In the Servant's own return to God, a larger vocation is given: shine as a light to all the nations, so that there is nowhere my salvation does not reach. All of life is your business, God sings to the Servant—every nation, every person, every life.

Surely this is the song God sings to each of us: that all of our work, no matter how local, must have the good of the whole world as its aim. In our globalized world, in which a seemingly innocuous action—a purchase, say—in one place can contribute to suffering in another, this is no easy vocation. Embedded in this call to be a light to the nations is a call to know the world in which we hope to shine. Through study and encounter, through travel and prayer, through seeking to understand the results of our choices of what to buy, what to wear, what to eat, we return, like the Servant, to God and receive a deeper vocation, one that encompasses strangers far off, as well as dear ones close at hand.

In the season of Epiphany, may we see our lives and the life of the world in the light of the glory of God, in which all our aspirations are lifted up and returned to us in forms we never would have imagined.

David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

### Isaiah 42:1-9 NRSV

<sup>1</sup> Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. <sup>2</sup> He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; <sup>3</sup> a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. <sup>4</sup> He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. <sup>5</sup> Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: <sup>6</sup> I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, <sup>7</sup> to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. <sup>8</sup> I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. <sup>9</sup> See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

### Our Unique Call

So many terrible things happen every day that we start wondering whether the few things we do ourselves make any sense. When people are starving only a few thousand miles away, when wars are raging close to our borders, when countless people in our cities have no homes to live in, our own activities look futile. Such considerations, however, can paralyze and depress us.

Here the word call becomes important. We are not called to save the world, solve all problems, and help all people. But each of us has our own unique call, in our families, in our work, in our world. We have to keep asking God to help us see clearly what our call is and to give us the strength to live out that call with trust. Then we will discover that our faithfulness to a small task is the most healing response to the illnesses of our time.

Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, entry for March 10