

GOD'S PROMISE IS FOR ALL WHO ARE STRANGERS AND ALIENS

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this Feast of the Baptism of our Lord:

He will not fail, and He will not be discouraged until His establishment in (the) Lord's justice in earth; and the coastlands wait for His Torah.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

When you heard the reading of the Old Testament for this day, did you recall that several of those phrases show up regularly in the Sunday services? In fact, you will sing some of them later today. After receiving the benefits of the Lord's justice on earth, the personal application of Law and Gospel in communion with your fellow saints, God will remind you that He has given you peace. He again will have opened the eyes of those once blind to His truths, because they, you, have seen His salvation in the means He chooses to bestow it to you. He will have provided that which He prepared before the foundation of the world. You will have consumed God's Light of revelation to the Gentiles. These are the words, in particular, which you are being encouraged to find reflected in your later singing this morning:

"I have given You for covenant to people, for light to Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to cause to bring out prisoners from (the) dungeon, from (the) house of prison those who sit in darkness."²

Those words also were read here two Sundays ago, as part of the Gospel reading. Did you recall that when you heard them again today?

¹ *Isaiah 42:4.*

² *Isaiah 42:6b-7.*

If not, don't fret, you are human. It is likely, that unless the Sunday after Christmas had a special meal, or gathering you attended, you likely can't remember what you ate for dinner that day. But, nonetheless, your body needed the food for energy.

Just so, your spirit, your inner Man, needs to feed from the words repeated here so often in the order of service, and about twice per year in the readings. It is not necessary that you know when the readings show up, just that you are present to hear them. That is because faith comes through hearing - the hearing of God's Word.³ The more you hear the Word of God, the more you will recognize it when it falls upon your ears. The regular hearing of the Word brings with it deeper knowledge into the mysteries of God. Such the Holy Spirit reveals through the Word planted into your ears!

So, in what canticle are you going to sing today regarding the fulfillment of the prophecy declared in the end of the Old Testament reading? (The Nunc Dimittis). Now, you are free to turn your thoughts to the rest of the text before us, beginning with these words:

Behold My servant whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom My soul delights. I gave My Spirit upon Him; justice He will cause to bring forth to (the) Gentiles.⁴

Those are God's Word of promise. They were first spoken to the faithful believers who were going to go into exile on account of the unfaithful, unbelieving majority of their nation. They are words given to sustain those who trusted in the Lord's Promise to send His Anointed One, their Messiah/Christ to lead them into freedom from

³ Romans 10:17.

⁴ Isaiah 42:1.

sin, death, and the devil, and into life eternal. To them the mystery of the Promised Chosen One was presented. In faith, a few from that soon-to-be deported people would cling to that mystery. They, and their descendants in the Faith, would wait hundreds of years for the mystery to be completely unveiled, to hold it as you have it revealed in today's Gospel reading. Hear the prophecy and the fulfillment again:

Behold My servant whom I uphold, My chosen One in whom My soul delights. I gave My Spirit upon Him...

Then, having been baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water. And behold, were opened to Him the heavens and He saw the Spirit of God descending like (a) Dove, also coming upon Him. Then behold, (a) Voice from the heavens saying, "This One remains My Son, the Beloved One in Whom I am well pleased."⁵

The Gospel reading makes clear to the Faithful that God's Chosen One, in Whom His soul delights, is none other than Jesus, whom He names His beloved Son. In His baptism, the Spirit of God is seen, by Jesus and his cousin John, to descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove. In that One's descent, God the Father places His Spirit upon the Son. (Both texts, you may have noticed, are Trinitarian – God/Father; Chosen One/Son; Spirit/Dove (That's just another revelation for the day for us))! There are more to come, as we hear the next Word of encouragement to those who were, and are, suffering under sin's assaults:

He will not cry out, and He will not lift up (His voice), and He will not make His voice heard in (the) street.⁶

Those words promise a different kind of deliverer. This One would not herald His arrival, and His salvation, with the command voice of a military leader. He

⁵ Matthew 3:16- 17.

would not be a town crier. (He would appoint others for that task – after His mission was complete). This was partially fulfilled following today's Gospel narrative. Do you know what happened directly after the Father declared Jesus His Beloved? (He was taken by the Spirit into the wilderness. There was no great processional victory parade that day, nor would there be for three years)!

The prophecy was further completed after Jesus' victory procession. Did you think we'd get to Good Friday through the Baptism into the Temptation of our Lord, and on to the Palm Sunday parade when you heard these texts? You should have expected to at least get to Christ on the Cross. That is the message of the Gospel after all, the reason this congregation decided to affix this crucifix to this pulpit!

In His baptism, the Beloved Son became one with us to be the Sin-bearer on the cross. Even there, He did not cry out His message of salvation: He called upon the Father to forgive His executioners.⁷ He did not lift up His voice to declare His salvation: He lifted it to declare what we who remain in Him need never declare: "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?"⁸ Jesus did not make His rally command in the streets that Day of Judgment, He simply breathed out before His final suffocation on the cross the confession of the Faith: "Into Your hands I commend My Spirit!"⁹

You, dear Christians, know that those are fulfilled Promises. You don't have to wait through decades of captivity in a foreign land for them to come true. You are not

⁶ *Isaiah 42:2.*

⁷ *Luke 23:34a.*

⁸ *Mark 15:34b.*

⁹ *Matthew 27:46b.*

going to wait centuries for them to be revealed. You, dear ones, have the clarity of the mysteries of God revealed for you. Why then, do you treasure them so infrequently?

In a word, because, though you are children of the fulfilled Promise in Christ Jesus, you are still children of your father Adam. His fallen nature still clings to you, and you will war with it until you breathe your last. That is why you are constantly reminded to daily return to your baptism, to drown your sins, and let the new Man in Christ rise daily in you. The Word of God continues for you who are troubled on account of your sins, and who look to God in Christ for deliverance:

(The) bruised reed He will not break, and (the) dimly burning wick He will not quench; faithfully He will cause to bring out justice.¹⁰

The people long ago, who would suffer for the iniquities of their fathers, their brothers and sisters, needed this consolation. Weighed down with punishment their faith had not brought upon them, yet suffering, many would say, unjustly, they were given God's Word of comfort.

For Christians today, those words mean that God will not break the repentant sinner, who cries out to Him for forgiveness. God will not extinguish the Faith that clings to His means of forgiveness, no matter how dimly Faith seems to glow. Those things are true because the Chosen One, the Christ, the Beloved Son, has caused to bring out eternal justice. That which the bruised reed – the person struck by his or her own sins – and the smoldering wick – the Christian whose use of the means of grace has been faltering – cannot do for themselves, He has done for them. He nurtures the faith by ever

calling the faithful to return to His sacrifice for our sins, His suffering for our punishment, and His death for our life. The Prophecy you know by the Faith to be completed in Jesus the Christ continues:

He will not fail, and He will not be discouraged until His establishment in (the) Lord's justice in earth; and the coastlands wait for His Torah.¹¹

People waiting in captivity for years held onto those words of Promise. Just so, you who have been liberated from captivity to sin, death and the devil are not, as you remain in the Faith, discouraged. For you know, and believe, and live, the reality that God has, in the death of Christ, established His justice on the earth. His justice was to punish His beloved for all mankind, but most especially for you who continue to believe in His justice. Nothing He did in establishing His justice was done on account of who you are, or what you do, what your forefathers and mothers did or did not do. It was all done for you solely out of God's grace, mercy and love for what He would make you – a forgiven sinner bound in Him together with all who call upon His Name in the Faith. You are the fulfillment of this prophecy – for you live here, the coastlands far from the Land of Promise.

Hear and believe: God's promise through Isaiah was not just for those who were going into exile in 722 BC. God's promise is for all who are strangers and aliens in this world full of sin and unbelief. This is sure and true, because the One who gave the

¹⁰ *Isaiah 42:3.*

¹¹ *Isaiah 42:4.*

Promise declares Himself to be the Creator of all, and the One who restores the fallen in Him, declares again today:

For, says the God, YHWH, Who created the heavens and stretched out the heavens, and Who spread forth the land, and Who causes that which comes from it and Who gives breath to people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.¹²

To people of the Faith, about to suffer in the Faith, on account of the faithless of their fellow people, God declares His creating and sustaining attributes. All who hear these words of prophecy, and especially you who are the beneficiaries of this day's prophecy are to know they are true, because the Author of Truth so declares them true. God testifies by Himself. He names His creation – recalling the order in which He made all things in six days – as the evidence that what He is about to say is true forever. That is:

"I YHWH called You, I called You in righteousness, and I have taken Your hand and kept You, and I have given You for covenant to people, for light to Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to cause to bring out from dungeon prisoners, from house of prison those who sit in darkness."¹³

God has called His Son, His Beloved, in yours ears again today. God has called Him to fulfill all righteousness, in His Baptism. God has given the Son as His New Covenant. This Covenant He seals with you today as the Chosen One comes to you in, with and under Bread and Wine. The Son is the One who shines through sin's darkness in you, who opens your eyes to His truths, who frees you from the devil's bonds, and releases you from hell's deep dark prison of separation from the Father.

¹² Isaiah 42:5.

¹³ Isaiah 42:6-7.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

The Baptism of our Lord (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Isaiah 42:1-7; I Corinthians 1:26-31; Matthew 3:13-17

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Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT

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"I YHWH called You, I called You in righteousness, and I have taken Your hand and kept You, and I have given You for covenant to people, for light to Gentiles.

To open blind eyes, to cause to bring out from dungeon prisoners, from house of prison those who sit in darkness."