

God is Glorified in His Servants

2nd Sun. after Epiphany – 01/15/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 49:1-7 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 6, [Yahweh says of His Servant the Christ,] **“...I will make You as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”**

Introduction

- ✘ This text from Isaiah today is the second of Isaiah’s four famous “Servant Songs” that prophecy to and introduce the promised Messiah as He will come to earth in human flesh to reveal God’s glory and to accomplish God’s plan and work of salvation for all sinful flesh.
 - ➔ In this particular text, the Servant Himself is the one who is calling the entire world to “listen” and “give attention” to Him as He describes who He is and how He brings all glory to Yahweh, His Father.
- ✘ Most children, whether they want to do it or not, eventually mature into adults who bear a certain likeness or resemblance of their parents, right? In a very real sense then, our children bring not only joy, but glory to us and our name. It may be physical similarities or mannerisms or personality traits. But it’s often the way that the priorities, values and convictions that make us who we are as individuals align together between parent and child.
 - ➔ The child merely demonstrates the same qualities that the parents have, and in doing so, those children bring their parents a great deal of joy and glory.
- ✘ In our Old Testament Reading today, the Servant described, brings God a great deal of glory. Yahweh even calls the Servant by name in verse three, “Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Is. 49:3).

I. God’s Servant Israel (nation) Didn’t Bring Him Glory

- ✘ The name “Israel” refers to three different entities in the Bible. Originally it is the name that God gave to Jacob after he wrestled all night with God. Literally the name means “he contends with God”.
 - ➔ But later, as Israel’s 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel, the name “Israel” became the name of the Hebrew nation (Exo 3:18). So, one man’s glory was displayed in the entire nation that was set apart as God’s chosen people.
 - ➔ Unfortunately those descendants of Jacob did not bring glory to God, did they? When He chose them to be His people, He promised to always be their God and to bless them in abundance, which He did. His intention was that, as His people, they would collectively be His faithful servant, not just among themselves but in and among all other nations around the world.
- ✘ But they let the designation of God’s chosen people go to their heads; thinking that they were somehow more important; more exceptional than the nations around them; as if they were the ones who actual did something to earn or deserve the designation of “God’s people”.
 - ➔ And so they took God for granted; they had no gratitude for all that God had given them; and the eyes of their faith wandered away from Yahweh toward the false gods of their neighbors. They treated each other and their neighbors with injustice and oppression; with arrogance and cruelty – all of which brought God anything but glory!
- ✘ Like these people of Israel in the Old Testament, we must be honest with our own reflections in the mirror of God’s Word, both as individuals and as collective members in the one Holy Christian Church, and we must confess that we too have failed greatly at times to bring God the glory He is due.

→ Yes, we can become pretty pompous and self-righteous; we can end up downright ungrateful for all of the blessings that God showers down upon us; thinking that we earned them; that we deserved them; or worse yet, that we are entitled to them – and in doing so our attention turns away from our Creator and God and finds the gods of our neighbors and our society; of our teachers and secular leaders to be quite attractive and alluring.

→ What does this look like in real life? Most often it's displayed by our daily mindset that focuses only on what we can get from others to benefit us; to gain a leg up; to get ahead of those around us in life instead of the other way around. Even the concept of us selflessly serving someone else where we not only don't benefit from the interaction but even that we may suffer or sacrifice something of ourselves in the mix – that makes us not just uneasy, but downright offended and repulsed. Remember – God knows everything about us folks. So don't try to wiggle your way out of the truth. You know that you've had these thoughts at some point in life.

→ So, at times, we, like Israel in the Old Testament, fail to bring God the glory He is due, don't we?

II. God's Servant (Jesus) Did Bring Him Glory

✘ Fortunately God's prophet Isaiah tells the people of his day that a new Servant would be sent by God; one who will be everything that the first Israel was not. This "servant" actually embodies God's original intent and desire for His "Chosen People, Israel" and He does it all in one flesh-and-blood human being. He is the only person who completely fulfills all of the characteristics of God's faithful servant; God's promised Messiah and Savior of sin-filled souls to God's perfect glory. Who is it? It's Jesus Christ of course. Here in this Reading, Jesus and the salvation He would bring is described some 700 years before He actually is born in the manger and eventually walks this earth.

→ This Servant of God begins our text today by describing how Yahweh called Him to His unique role "from the womb" and gave Him His God-ordained name "from the body of His mother". In other words, God set this Servant apart from all others even before this Servant was born. And through this Servant – in His name "Jesus" that means "Yahweh saves" and in fulfilling His role of saving all souls with the ultimate attitude of love and self-sacrifice, Jesus would bring the fullest glory possible to the one and only true God!

✘ Yes this Servant glorified God by completing His Father's will voluntarily, willingly, in laying down His life as the only substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world. As Jesus said in Mark 10:45, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many".

→ In His internal torment in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, in His High Priestly Prayer, cried out to the Father only hours before He would go to the cross, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him" (Jn. 17:1–2). This incomprehensible humility and undeserved love for all of our sin-steeped souls as we see it here in Jesus – this is what brings glory to God, the Father.

✘ And nowhere is the glory of God more visible for the entire world to see than on the actual cross of Calvary. There, Jesus serves not only His Father, but all of us – you and me, by paying the penalty required by our sin. Stop and consider that for just a moment: in Jesus Christ, true man according to His mother's DNA and also true God as the second person in the one Triune God - God Himself – yes, God bows His head and dies for sinners. It's utterly amazing and incomprehensible! Yet at the same time it is there that Jesus reveals the fullest extent of the glory of God for the entire world to see!

→ And Isaiah tells us all about it hundreds of years earlier so that we can see even more of God's glory. He says that this Servant will bring glory to God by the scope of His work. In verse six, God says of His Servant, "It is too light a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make You as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth".

- ✘ That is no small, limited mission that He lays out before us there, is it? Jesus did not die for just some of the world's sin or only for some of the world's sinners. As John the Baptizer so precisely proclaims it in today's Gospel Reading, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). His work was all-encompassing. He is a "light to the nations" – the chosen people of Israel and even "to the end of the earth". That's how far and wide Yahweh intends that His salvation will reach.

III. Modern-day Servants (Church) Bring God Glory

- ✘ And now, guess what – it's you and me; it's our lives that have been eternally changed through the work of God's Servant, so that we are now His under-servants to reveal the glory of God to the world. And it's not only when we come together here in Divine Service on Sunday in this "safe space". No, it is daily that we have, and take advantage of the opportunity to let those around us see the glory of God through our words and our actions. Yes, you heard me correctly; today we are God's servants, we are the New Israel following in the footsteps of the Servant of God, Jesus Christ.

→ If you look up the definition of the word "servant" in the dictionary it is defined as "one who performs tasks for others". Well, as Christians; as those who are blessed to be included in the New Israel, when we think of our lives, we might amend that definition slightly to read, "one who performs tasks that bring God glory."

- ✘ Because God's Servant, Jesus has freed us from our sins, He has empowered us to freely love one another as He has loved us. Freed from our sins, we are free to eagerly and joyfully place the needs of those around us above our own. Freed from our sins, we are free every day until Jesus comes again – or until He takes us from this earth, to serve all people around us, in ways that glorify God!

→ And there are thousands of ways that you and I can do this – so many that I'd be wasting my time if I tried to give you examples. I'm confident, that with God's help, we can all figure out more than enough ways to glorify God in serving others with His love. To help us in this unique and special role, Jesus has bound Himself to us in service. And here in His Church He has bound us to one another for mutual support and aid and encouragement through His gifts of Word and Sacrament.

Conclusion

- ✘ A servant's life in the early 1900s England, as it is depicted in the TV show *Downton Abbey*, was anything but easy. These servants experienced long hours, often spent in hard, physical labor. Whether it was cooking, cleaning, carrying luggage, shining shoes, or any number of other domestic duties, the life of the servant was arduous and grueling.

→ The servant was to listen and not to speak when a member of the family spoke to him or her. Only if they were asked to respond would servants be expected to engage in conversation with the family. And most definitely servants were not permitted to speak about themselves. Being a servant at that time was not an easy way of life to be sure.

→ In a similar way, from an earthly point of view, it is not necessarily easy being God's servant now in this day and age. Our sinful nature, the devil, and the world is quick to tell us that we

must first focus on serving ourselves; that we “deserve” to bring ourselves as much glory as we can.

✘ Yet as we know, our culture is increasingly turning away from Jesus and His Church, so that now the majority of people don't even see a need for a Savior; not even wanting or allowing us to speak of the idea that Christ is the world's Savior.

➔ So in the face of these challenges, we pray today that God would daily equip and strengthen us through His Word and Sacrament to be His servants; to *Share God's Word* and serve Him as we *Serve All* people – not for our glory, but in gratitude toward Him, we serve for His eternal glory alone. In the name of Jesus, God's Servant, today and forever. Amen.