

**1.15.23 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany**

**“Words of Affirmation”**

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Isaiah 49:1-7 (NRSVue)**

*The Servant's Mission*

<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.”

**L: These are Words of Fulfilled Prophecy! All: Thanks be to God!**

**John 1:29-49 (CEV)**

*The Lamb of God*

<sup>29</sup> The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said:

Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> He is the one I told you about when I said, “Someone else will come, who is greater than I am, because he was alive before I was born.” <sup>31</sup> I didn't know who he was. But I came to baptize you with water, so that everyone in Israel would see him.

<sup>32</sup> I was there and saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven. And the Spirit stayed on him. <sup>33</sup> Before this I didn't know who he was. But the one who sent me to baptize with water had told me, “You will see the Spirit come down and stay on someone. Then you will know that he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>34</sup> I saw this happen, and I tell you that he is the Son of God.

*The First Disciples of Jesus*

<sup>35</sup> The next day, John was there again, and two of his followers were with him. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus walking by, he said, “Here is the Lamb of God!” <sup>37</sup> John's two followers heard him, and they went with Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them, he asked, “What do you want?”

They answered, “Rabbi, where do you live?” The Hebrew word “Rabbi” means “Teacher.”

<sup>39</sup> Jesus replied, “Come and see!” It was already about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him and saw where he lived. So they stayed on for the rest of the day.

<sup>40</sup> One of the two men who had heard John and had gone with Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. <sup>41</sup> The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother and tell him, “We have found the Messiah!” The Hebrew word “Messiah” means the same as the Greek word “Christ.”

<sup>42</sup> Andrew brought his brother to Jesus. And when Jesus saw him, he said, “Simon son of John, you will be called Cephas.” This name can be translated as “Peter.”

*Jesus Chooses Philip and Nathanael*

<sup>43-44</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. There he met Philip, who was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. Jesus said to Philip, “Follow me.”

<sup>45</sup> Philip then found Nathanael and said, “We have found the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote about. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

<sup>46</sup> Nathanael asked, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

Philip answered, “Come and see.”

<sup>47</sup> When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, “Here is a true descendant of our ancestor Israel. And he isn't deceitful.”

<sup>48</sup> “How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.”

<sup>49</sup> Nathanael said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God and the King of Israel!”

**Leader: These are Words of Affirmation. All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Father God, we are grateful for your Son, Jesus. We heard the words of prophecy from Isaiah and from John the Baptist that assure us he is your servant for our salvation. Let us be like the disciples who followed Jesus, confident in their calling, even though they had no idea what they were to do. Lord, help us understand these verses in a way we can apply to the whole new year of 2023, not yet certain of the divine experiments you are calling us to try. Be with those who cannot be here today, and please speak through this messenger. Amen.

---

Thank you to another group of volunteers this week! Thank you, Young at Heart Gadabouts leaders and lunch bunch for a fun and nutritious outing. Two members of the ABE landscaping team came by the office to tidy up the grounds and repair the kitchen stove! And then our good friends came by the next day to look at the florist refrigerator and completed the burner repair! This is community, discipleship, and generosity at its best. Thank you! Now let's dive into our lesson.

In last week's sermon, we first met the "servant" in a messianic passage of Isaiah 42. Note that in Isaiah chapters 41-48, the focus of the prophet's writing dealt with King Cyrus and returning the Jews to their homeland after exile. Chapters 49-57 foretell the servant-Messiah filling his ministry role to restore the covenant people to the land. It would be a long transition, and despite rejection, this servant will take salvation to the Gentiles.

Textual confusion in any prophecy is likely to exist, so let's examine it. In verses 1-5 of today's text, God's servant is the speaker. The name "Israel" here in verse 3 is not the nation, but is the Messiah so called to symbolize the nation. Verse 5 reference to Israel is the covenant descendants of Abraham who had been exiled. The Messiah's commission is to restore Jacob and Israel to the Lord. With God's strength he would be a light to the Gentiles around the world, so that all people, not just the covenant people could receive salvation. That's important!

The servant, mentioned in verses 3, 5 and 6 is assured he was chosen, yet the identity of the servant is problematic. Some say the servant mentioned is Abraham as the father of the nation or Jeremiah as

divinely inspired prophet and spokesman. This scholar wondered for a moment in her study whether the servant was John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. Most believers understand the “Servant” is Jesus, and a few suggest Paul. It is important in academic circles, but does not matter so much to our interpretation; we read Isaiah **not** as a fortune teller’s crystal ball but as a people’s history and poetry to help us understand our faith and belief. No matter the answer, we do know that the prophet speaks of the “covenantal chosen one” to responsibly carry on the work of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, four of the 5 Covenants. The **Messianic** covenant that we celebrate every time we observe communion is the 5<sup>th</sup> covenant and as Christians and having just gone through Christmas, that makes the most sense to us: “The Lord called me before I was born; while I was in my mother’s womb he named me (Is. 49:1b).”

Did you think a little about your baptism this week? We read about Jesus’ baptism in Matthew’s gospel last Sunday as Christ submitted to the ritual of water baptism and God proclaimed his beloved son when the heavens opened. This week, John’s account is spiritual and affirming, as John the Baptist testifies to what he did and witnessed. Recall that by now, John had many disciples being baptized but we do not know if any of them heard the voice of God.

John the Baptist also identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God. He testifies that yes, John and Jesus are related through Mary and Elizabeth, but his role was only to prepare the way for one greater than he, his cousin Jesus. We know he recognized Jesus in the womb, but I often wonder if he knew or remembered as an older child that the Messiah would be Jesus or more likely he discerned this just before he baptized

him. God's words of affirmation were not necessary for John's belief, remember, because he questioned his authority to baptize the Messiah! He would baptize with water, but the one coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit, with a power directly from God! He trusted God and was obedient despite his concern.

Did you know that Christ's first disciples were also John's? This is the first affirmation: John was an authentic evangelist, teacher, and prophet. He was a humble servant of God's carrying out his own anointed calling. Two of John's disciples decided to follow Jesus. According to the writer, John, Andrew was the first proclaimer that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one. Then the fishermen James and John were called by Jesus to follow him, and they did. Then Simon joined him, and Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas, a Syriac surname for "rock," but became the Greek name, Peter, as we know it. His name was also prophetic for upon this rock or man, the church was started.

That is where we officially ended, but if you continue through verse 49, you will learn that Philip also became a disciple who testified to Nathaniel who became a disciple. He was surprised that the Son of God would come from such a lowly place as Nazareth. Matthew 2:23 shows Jesus being a Nazarene was told, because Mary and Joseph had gone there to escape death, remember, from King Archelaus in Judea. Language scholars think Matthew may have used the term to indicate a humble birth and upbringing by Joseph and Mary.

These few disciples mentioned were just ordinary men; yet they discerned that Jesus was no ordinary man. That's the second affirmation: Jesus was and is the Lamb of God. These words signified a sacrificial

offering from God to humans, and was familiar to temple custom. It may have also been a prophetic imaginative phrase to prepare people for Christ's eventual sacrifice on the cross as a penance for human's sin.

Jesus' role was affirmed for all time in these simple words from John the Baptist and his own new disciples. Jesus risked it all for us. When we take risks for the sake of our faith (like missionaries, taking on a new ministry, or even tithing), don't we like to receive affirmation? Having you pray for this trip is affirming for me, and it has almost no risk. What does risk for your faith mean to you? Isn't that one reason we turn to Scripture or the old hymns to affirm our faith? It isn't just for comfort, but for strength. As we believers at United continue to grow in our faith walk and step out more into the community, meeting new people and trying new things, we may hit a speed bump or an obstacle, and that is ok! How we respond is the key; there must be a careful balance between the human and the divine in our ministry and activity experiments this year. Let us use John the Baptist's humility and the disciples' obedience as our model moving forward. Christ is the Messiah, so let us share that good news even if there are risks involved. Please continue to listen for God's direction while I'm gone and be prepared for some stories when I return. They will both affirm and fuel our year of Divine Experiments. For pastoral care needs for the next two weeks, please contact Roudaina in the office, and she will pass on to the appropriate staff or council member for assistance. Pastor Ed is always on stand-by for emergencies as well. She will have all the appropriate information. May God bless our speakers and your worship time while I'm gone. Amen! ||

**Will you pray with me?** God of all life, we thank you for these words to remind us of our baptismal and discipleship commitment. May our relationship with you through Jesus grow and daily affirm to ourselves and to the world your grace and mercy. Bring transformational ministries into our church and community, as we explore what “divine experiments” will come. Keep us safe and secure in your care. We thank you for the affirmation of your power through Jesus. **Amen.**