

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 42:1–9

Sermon: “The One and Only”

We now move through the Sundays after the Epiphany, Jesus will be revealed as the embodiment of God’s Word and promises. Especially today in the *Gospel* as Jesus is baptized, crowned with the Holy Spirit as a dove, and proclaimed to be the “beloved Son, with whom [God] is well pleased.” This is actually an echo of our Old Testament Reading from Isaiah where the Servant is God’s Chosen, anointed with the Spirit and the delight of his heavenly Father.

Keith Allen Barton made lots of promises, according to NBC news in San Diego. He claimed he could cure things like cancer and HIV with a new alternative therapy. People trusted Dr. Barton, and many put their lives in his hands. That was a mistake. He wasn’t a real doctor.

He had no medical training. His treatments didn't cure anyone. They only left patients robbed of tens of thousands of dollars. In one case, a nine-year-old girl died because she didn't get the real treatment she needed. Barton preyed on those who were desperate and needed hope. In the end, those who came to him had their hopes dashed to pieces when he failed to deliver.

Our text from Isaiah 42 shows a much different story. After exposing all the "pretenders," all the false gods who could do nothing but snuff out all hope (Isaiah 41), the Lord introduces the real contender, his chosen Servant who will contend for us and deliver exactly what is promised to those who need real hope. That Servant is Jesus! Jesus is the real contender, the One and Only.

People have lots of choices. The people of Isaiah's day had lots of options when it came to looking for hope. There was the hope that their king could help them stay safe and prosperous through military might or political maneuvering. There was the hope that they could somehow make their own way through life. Then there was the hope that Isaiah's prophetic prediction of doom, defeat, and downfall was just wrong. And, of course, there was the hope that was offered to the followers of the false gods worshiped in Babylon, such as Marduk, or the Canaanite gods, Baal or Asherah. All pretenders.

People still have lots of choices today. And they'll always choose what they think will bring meaning and security to their lives. We all have idols in our lives at one time or another. It could be work or some hobby. It can be the pursuit of something in life such as money or power.

There are all kinds of idols that can replace God in our lives, things we think will make our lives complete. Can you think of something in your life this past week that you just couldn't live without?

People will choose money, self-indulgence, power, and success. They will look to princes and rulers to keep them safe and prosperous. They will look to their own good works or to the acclaim of others to give them meaning. But they're all pretenders, and there's greater danger here than just making the wrong choice. There's the danger that the choice will destroy us and leave us with nothing but eternal regret and despair.

That's why Yahweh says to each one of us who's clinging to false hopes, "No! Here is my Servant." Here is God's choice for hope and salvation, the one who will contend for us.

This One will be ridiculed and rejected by man (Isaiah 53:3; Luke 23:35). And so, God points to his chosen well before the ridicule and reviling begins, so that when it does happen, we will not falter in our faith. As Christians when the world reviles us and our faith we can turn back to this text and hear God say, **“Behold, my servant . . . in whom my soul delights”** (v 1). He was called in **“righteousness”** (v 6). This Chosen Servant will become the source of God’s grace for all people as one who is truly righteous.

And finally, this Chosen One of God will be set apart from the pretenders by a special anointing of the Holy Spirit, which will not only empower him for his task, but also indicate to all that he is the one set apart by God. **“I have put my Spirit upon him”** (v 1).

No others will receive this anointing, the Spirit of God descending upon him in bodily form like a dove.

No others will be guaranteed to do what he does and bring what he will bring for those who desperately need hope.

That's what makes the Servant of the Lord different from the pretenders. He ***"will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street"*** (v 2). Because he is chosen by God and upheld by him, he carries out his task in the quiet confidence that he is doing God's will (Isaiah 53:7). When this true Servant of the Lord was arrested and stood before Pilate facing many false accusations, he had no need to defend himself. So he remained silent. Because he is anointed by the Spirit, he does not need to depend on persuasive arguments or slick promotional campaigns to convince people he is able to bring God's justice to the world. He doesn't sell himself. He gives himself.

The Servant of the Lord is also different from all the pretenders because he will show compassion on those weak and wavering—near the breaking point—or whose faith is flickering (v 3).

When our conscience is wounded and spirit is weak, he doesn't write us off as someone beyond hope or not worth the effort. He won't tell us we need to try harder to escape our problem, or pray harder, or be more sincere in faith. He'll come to us and bind us up with his healing Word of forgiveness.

This Servant of the Lord is the real contender, he shines above the pretenders. This Servant of the Lord shines above them because he is sent to set the prisoner free from the dungeon of darkness and sin (v 7). While all the false gods only imprison, this Servant of the Lord sets free and brings light and life.

Hear it in the words of one who's lived it in his own life, who needed a real contender. Tyler is a young man who today sits in prison, anxiously waiting the day of his release. Through the ministry of the local pastor, the Holy Spirit called him to repentance and faith.

Every day waking up in prison is a nightmare. Not that it's particularly scary or a place I fear. It's the aspect of having no options. I am told by those in authority what to do and when to do it. When it's time to eat, they tell me. I have no choice when or what to eat. Rec time is the same way: outside my control. It's all outside my control.

Spiritual imprisonment to sin is, in many ways, the same. When we're spiritually imprisoned to sin, our flesh is calling all the shots. We are not in control. Our sin is in control, and we are a slave to it.

I have found time and time again that, when left to my own devices, I am always snared by sin. I have found that the only way out of this prison is Jesus Christ. He gives me the strength to resist the paths of sin, which lead only to death. How is that possible? Because Christ died for the sins of the world and rose again on the third day, triumphing over sin and death so that I can be set free from my bondage.

Long ago, in the days of Isaiah, God designated his Servant to set the prisoner free. Isaiah was sent with the prophecy revealing the Servant of the Lord. It was a message for those who would be tempted to find their own hope in this world. It was a message for those whose misplaced trust was about to leave them with nothing but brokenness and death. It was a call to turn away from the false gods and prophets and live.

We know that this one was promised and now has come,
manifest at the waters of the Jordan River. God has not only
promised; he has delivered. And in him, he has delivered each of
us.

Amen