

Jonathan Mark  
Good Monday Service  
Isaiah 49:1-7  
3/29/2021

### **Words of Welcome**

Welcome to our Good Monday service here in my home. Join me around the candlelight for our savior is entering the final week of his mortal mission on earth. Gather around my children, for the light of the world shines in the darkness and there are mysteries to uncover. The prophet Isaiah has a word for us this evening. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen to the servant of God, Listen to the prophet that is despised by the world, Listen so that your light might also shine bright for righteousness and justice's sake.

### **Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-7**

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.  
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.  
And he said to me, "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."  
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."

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—  
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.”

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.”

### **Meditation**

Listen, because the Holy One of Israel has chosen you.

We Mennonites tend to stand in the middle of humility and prophetic speech. I know that in the past when I have spoken about how the role of the prophet is to listen to and speak God’s will, you have pointed out that some of our more embarrassing spiritual ancestors have done great evil when they assume they know God’s will. I think this was because my sermon on the prophetic voice happened around the same time as a lesson on Munster happened. As many of you know, in Munster, an allegedly Anabaptist group of people, led by Jan Matthys, took over the city of Munster, expelled the Catholics, and proclaimed a new Zion with compulsory polygamy and adult baptism. Elsewhere in Russia, some of us are literal ancestors of groups who had charismatic leaders of dubious credentials.

But here we have a passage to the redeem of Israel, a prophet who was chosen in their mother’s womb to gather Israel back to God’s Bussum. Here we have a light to the nations, to preach salvation to the ends of the Earth. Christians throughout history have dedicated this passage to Jesus. Who is indeed a chosen one of Israel, the light of the world, the son of God. But at the same time, I think it is important to be respectful of Isaiah, who was speaking in the context of the exile, and in his time, the servant of God would have been someone different, one who would labor with God’s words in their mouth to gather the tribes of Jacob home. But Isaiah could also be speaking about all of Israel as God’s servant, because the Jewish people are indeed a light to the nations, and our New Testament tells us that we are grafted onto that mission. To be the light to the nations.

How do we deal with this contradiction? How do we as a people acknowledge that experience teaches us that unchecked charismatic leadership can lead us astray, while also acknowledging that the Bible has given us the commission to be the light to the nations? There are no easy answers. Nevertheless, I think we would do well to listen to the wisdom of our history and our prophets. We Mennonites have something important to say. We have been chosen by God to

preach a part of the Gospel, or to say it another way, We Mennonites have a part of the truth that will enrich the human race, just like Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and atheists have truth to share with the whole human race. We should have humility because we do not have a monopoly on truth or even a monopoly on Jesus who came to save not just us, but the whole world. We should have humility in pointing out where our blind spots are and how we have and continue to fail to shine our light. I am reminded about how the CLC recently rejected the call of our LGBTQ siblings to repent how Mennonite Church USA has hurt them with their membership guidelines. Nevertheless, if we Anabaptists had not shined our light along with our Quaker siblings in Christ, there might not be a nonviolent movement within Christianity. And there certainly would not have been a conscientious objector exemption from the draft. If we Anabaptists did not join with Quakers, Baptists, and Presbyterians, there may not have been the religious freedom to have a church free of state control.

We have a light to shine and for the sake of others, I argue that we must shine it. I argue that we should claim our limited and fallible slice of truth. That we should follow Jesus down the dangerous path of speaking truth to power. Of being prepared to fight for justice and peace for all of God's children. Do it in how you pray, not just for yourself, but in how you pray for others. In how you open yourself up to pain by investigating their plight, in witnessing their troubles, and in praying for a resolution even if you do not know what that resolution is. Show your light in how you talk to your neighbors, in your, no matter where you're from, we're glad you are our neighbor sign you keep in your front yard. Show your light in how you vote, In who you give your money to, In your questions during peace center.

Showing our light is a difficult thing, so let me give you one simple thing we can do this holy week to share our light. I want each of you to find or make a piece of resistance art and send it to me for sharing time on Sunday. Resistance art is a painting, video, poem, or whatever medium you wish, that shows how the love of Christ resists the powers of death in this world. Here I have an engraving from our spiritual ancestors, Dirk Willims, who shined Christ's light by sacrificing his own life to save the life of his pursuer. Death can have no power over us if our love is so great that we call even our enemies precious children of God. If we rescue our pursuers from the frozen waters then we cannot be controlled by fear or selfishness. Then we can be servants of God, pursuing God's mission of peace and justice to the ends of the earth.

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the end of the earth.

**Music: Jesus calls us for the Tumult**

**Ritual: Circle Prayer for Justice**

A circle prayer is an acknowledgment that each individual here has a deep and personal connection with the divine. I myself, even as your clergy, I do not have a monopoly on God.

Neither do I have all the right words to say to you as you overhear my prayer to God. Each of us has something important to say and so everyone is invited to lift a prayer to God. We will go around the circle. I will begin and end our prayer. Since we're not in a physical circle, I have sent the order in chat. Don't worry if we lose track, if it is silent too long, I will speak your name of who is next.

### **The extinguishing of the light**

If you look behind me you will see that the light of Christ is heading to the cross. On Friday, the Son of God will be raised up and exalted upon a Roman cross. So in memory of his journey unto death, we shall extinguish one light. We do this in somber expectation but do not lose heart for we know what Easter will bring.

### **Benediction**

Here this Benediction, You are mirrors of divine light. Go, not to shine your own light, but shine the light of God into dark places. Witness to Injustice. Stand in solidarity with the oppressed. And empower the unheard. If you do this work, then you will not labor in vain, for God goes with you.