

#8 16-17

Scriptures

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Matthew 3:13-17

Isaiah 42:1-9

Being Lights

¹Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴*He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.* ⁵Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; *I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,* ⁷*to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.* ⁸I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. ⁹See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

This is the Sunday which is closest to Epiphany, and is also the first Sunday after Epiphany (which is the 6th). On this day we contemplate the Lord's Baptism. Now, questions have arisen since Jesus came to John the Baptist in order to be baptized by him! Why would someone who has no sins - was born of a virgin - child of God - need to get baptized!? John saw right away that Jesus was superior to him! And it seemed to throw off some internal sense of order that Jesus should come to HIM for this rite.

And yet, Jesus insisted, John baptized, and God confirmed before all the witnesses the relationship God had with Jesus.

The writer of Matthew wanted to show Jesus as one for whom obedience and righteousness was very important. So, the Jewish Law - the Mitzvoth - was that one goes through these ritual cleansings, and Jesus was, after all a good Jew. Following the laws of love and the rituals for righteousness and faith in God's will is the best example that Jesus could set for those who would follow him.

This Baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, and he is shown to be purifying himself for the mission ahead. This is what our baptisms are about as well. We didn't graduate with our baptism or confirmation and then we were done. Just as Jesus showed us in his baptism that this rite is done as the mark of a beginning commitment to becoming God's instruments - God's missionaries - God's beings, on this earth - our lives of faith only begin with our commitment to begin members. We are called everyday to renew our baptisms, seek repentance, and go forth in love and confidence to do God's Will.

Now, the Sermon scripture is from Isaiah, sometimes referred to as "the fifth Gospel." So much of it is seen as making reference to who the Christ was and how the Christ would be. This quote is actually a song, in 2 stanzas. The first stanza is 1-4 and the second, 5-9. As music has a way of engaging more

parts of the brain and the whole being than anything else, we can joyfully take part in the singing and the emotions of this song.

The prophet is speaking of God's servant, and there is much discussion as to who this scripture was referring. But over the centuries, we have grown accustomed to the servant being Christ, and as one who call ourselves by His name and seek to be of His essence, perhaps we can call ourselves to the task of fulfilling what is being sung about here.

God is being said to have invested God's Self into being one who is actively involved in what is going on, in this earth. God delights in those souls who bring forth justice, and does so peacefully. God's soul delights in those who are kind and gentle, and yet faithful in doing justice. God delights in those who are vigilant and earnest in doing their lives as ones seeking to do God's will and create righteousness. The first stanza is about how God delights in God's servant and it is about what this servant does.

Justice is referred to 3 times in this one stanza. Because everyone can relate to the feeling of life not being fair. Everyone can relate to the idea that sometimes we feel so alone and hopeless. We live in fear of what we do not know, and want to be good servants, so it doesn't seem just that we should be expected to serve justice, when we don't know what is coming!

And that is why this second stanza is so important. It reminds us of who we are dealing with. This God - our God - is so intimately involved with every aspect of our human existence - from the planet itself, to the air that moves and transforms in and out of our lungs and throughout our bodies. It is this God, who loves and created us, who will be with us as we serve. This God declare new things, knows of things, and shares the vision of justice and love, before they even happen. He serves as "a light to the nations, to open eyes that are blind, to bring prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Light into darkness - freedom for the incarcerated - mercy and justice and compassion and light . . . and light . . . and even more light. The past is over, God is revealing a future that God knows about, and we may not be able to see it - but THIS is the promise of the Epiphany - THIS is the promise of being baptized into the life and love of Jesus Christ - the promise that this God who created and knows all ~ will be with us ~ and we are called to trust this God.

We cannot know what we do not know until we know it. BUT we can know that we can trust in this powerful, just God. We can know that IF we, as Christ did, are obedient to the mission of Christ - the mission to BE his body in service to others, to sacrifice our Wills for Justice, for companionship, for offering hope and encouragement, for listening and seeking the voice of the Holy Spirit, we WILL one day know and do and be good servants of the one God. God will be speaking of us when we read, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." This will be us, as we are one in Christ and one as his Body here at Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).