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Jan

Give You as a Light

Glory Revealed

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, YEAR A

As we move deeper into the season after Epiphany, we continue to explore the glory God reveals among us.

REFERENCES

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

COLORS

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It might be worth musing about the identity of the servant in our Isaiah text this week. Is it an individual, Jacob who is renamed Israel, perhaps, or Isaiah himself? Is it the nation of Israel, God's people, called to live as the sign of God's glory at work in the world? What are the markers that convince you one way or another? Does it matter? Well, yes. Wrestling with the text is always a fruitful exercise. When we do so and invite others to do so, we are training our minds to think like God. We can begin to hear the message that God had and still has for God's people. In the end, our musing ought to bring us around to the idea that God is speaking about us. We are the ones called into service. We are the ones who need to be the proclaimers, the ones who carry the light out into the world. We are the servant Isaiah 49 is talking about.

I know it is hard to put ourselves in that place. We don't feel named before we were even born. We don't feel equipped, like we speak with a mouth like a sword, or like a polished arrow from the quiver of God. Surely the text is pointing toward someone else. Well, yes, but actually, no. Forgive

the meme quote there. One of the great things about the Bible is that it functions on multiple levels at once. There is, for example, a historical reference here. and discerning that truth can help us understand how this text was used and seen by readers and hearers of these words from the beginning. But there is also a faith reference here. We are being referenced in these words. We are being called to be the servant, the instrument of God's glory at work in the world. So, listen again and listen deeper. Insert your own name as you read.

What you will find as you insert yourself in this text is both a high calling and a profound blessing. The high calling is found in the certainty that this light is a light to the world and not to a single people; it's not a national promise, but a universal one. Verse one declares in a loud voice to the coastlands – our own borders – and to the people far away. We do not have exclusive rights to the proclamation, to the call to service, to the blessing light. Then further in, we read in the voice of God, who 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 (Isa. 49:6 NRSV.)

“To the end of the earth.” Any claim for special preference is denied in this text. It is a reminder of the purpose of the chosenness of the people of God from the beginning. They were blessed to be a blessing, as many have noted before. They were chosen; we were chosen before we came into being as individuals or the community we call the church. We were given a name and a task to bring light into the world and glory to God.

Are we up to the task? Well, no. Let's be honest, we fail more often than we succeed. We focus on self more than the other. We keep quiet when we should speak out, and we run our mouths when we should be quiet. We aren't worthy of the call. At least, that is how we feel most of the time or the times when we take an honest look at ourselves. In that, we are not alone. The servant of Isaiah 49 was not up to the task either. “But I said, ‘I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity’” (Isa. 49:4 NRSV). “I can't do it,” the servant says. “I tried and it wasn't working, or it didn't work. I didn't see the results I hoped to see. I got in the way of my own efforts. Whatever it was, I am not worthy of the call,” the servant says, sounding frighteningly like us in our inadequacy.

But that isn't the end of verse 4, you probably noticed. Our doubts and hesitations are not the end of the story. Neither were they the end of the story for the servant of Isaiah 49.

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" (Isa. 49:4 NRSV).

"Yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward is with my God." What does that mean? It sounds like the end of the sentence that begins "I am not worthy" is "but I am called anyway." The task is beyond me, but I am called anyway. The vision is bigger than I am, but I am called anyway. The light is beyond me, but I am called to be a carrier of that light until rulers shall see and bow before the goodness and the glory of God. I may never see that day in this life, but I will carry that light anyway.

The Sagrada Familia Basilica in Barcelona, Spain, is said to be almost completed. Sometime in 2026, the last scaffold will come down, and the structure will stand in all its amazing glory. It is a masterpiece of architectural wonder and already draws crowds of sightseers from around the world. Many are awestruck by the wondrous play of light from the immense windows throughout the building. It was designed by Antoni Gaudí; construction began in 1882, with Gaudí taking over as chief architect in 1883. It is said that Gaudí knew he would never see the completed structure, but he designed and built it anyway. When asked about this, he was said to have remarked, "The patron of this project is not in a hurry."

We are called to be a part of a project that is bigger than we can see. It is nothing less than the reconciliation of the whole world to God. It is the bringing of the kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. If we catch that vision, then we can carry a light that shines beyond us and from within us. We become a part of the light we proclaim.

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