

Isaiah 49:1-6 1Epi Sermon 2024

Listen to me, you coastlands.
Pay attention, you faraway peoples!
The LORD called me from the womb.
When I was inside my mother, he mentioned my name.
2He made my mouth like a sharpened sword.
He hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me a polished arrow.
He concealed me in his quiver.
3He said to me, “You are my servant Israel,
in whom I will display my glory.”
4But I said to myself, “I have labored in vain.
I spent my strength and came up empty, with nothing.
Yet a just verdict for me rests with the LORD,
and my reward is with my God.”
5But now the LORD,
who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to turn Jacob back to him,
so that Israel might be gathered to him,
so that I will be honored in the eyes of the LORD,
because my God has been my strength—
6the LORD said:
It is too small a thing that you should just be my servant
to raise up only the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the ones I have preserved in Israel,
so I will appoint you to be a light for the nations,
so that my salvation will be known to the end of the earth.

When you go to the library there is a section for ‘historical fiction’ which is a popular place these days. If you believe the internet – historical fiction may have begun in 1819 with Sir Walter Scott’s “Ivanhoe.” According to another writer who says that we are living in the golden age of historical fiction because so many people say, “I’ve seen the future and I’m not going” ... in a sense living in the past.

Baptism is everything historical and miraculous and nothing fictional.

God is the one who gives faith – and he does it through Holy Baptism. God is the one who strengthens faith – and he does it through Holy Baptism. God brings his promise of everlasting life in heaven – and he does it through Holy Baptism. Our personal gift of Holy Baptism is a daily blessing that I’m afraid we all too often – myself included – tend to forget and allow other things and feelings get in God’s way of grace.

There is nothing fictional and everything historical and miraculous with Holy Baptism.

So do you think God has something to say in today’s reading? God starts Isaiah 49 by saying, “listen and pay attention.” In order to listen and pay attention we need to know where we are and where God is. God doesn’t say, “I will listen to you, I will pay attention to you.” His salvation being given is what matters most for mortals here on earth. Jesus is God’s salvation in the middle of the conversation held in verses 3-6. When God is speaking it might be a good idea to pay attention – eternity depends on his words!

What might that faraway mean? All are faraway from God because all are faraway in sin. Faraway from heaven and God’s favor and grace from where we normally, naturally stand. Like a distant coastland on the other side of an ocean. Can we see the shore of Michigan from this Wisconsin shore? No. So far removed and far away from God is where we stand as a distant coastline and shore. There is an ocean we could never cross, a body of water that prevents us from getting close to God. A type of water separates us because of our drowning in sin, a formidable flood.

So how much more appropriate is Holy Baptism by which God uses water. But not just plain water – water commanded and connected that communicates God’s gift of grace with his Holy name. Water that suddenly pulls us from an eternally distant shore to now be on the same side with God himself as we continue listening and paying attention to God’s salvation. Miracle water given by God does that through Holy Baptism.

The people who are faraway and distant coastlands are Gentiles – you and me. We were not born in Jerusalem – we do not live in Bethlehem or Nazareth, in fact it is rare for Americans to have an opportunity to travel to those exotic and distant places. Isaiah is speaking to all Gentiles in this first verse from the standpoint of Jesus whose mouth speaks sharp and polished words. Jesus, from his beginning to his end, came to be a servant for coastland and faraway peoples.

God teaches that we effectively sin to our own harm.

Jesus is an effective Savior.

But are we effective members?

Sharp and polished are the words of Jesus. So much so that those who hear them are cut to the heart with the law that shows our sin. The Gospel of God declares those same sinners to be saved by God’s salvation that he brings to every coastland and faraway people. To know Jesus is to know that God saves. To know Jesus is to know what he says so sharply with divine polish and clarity. Make disciples by speaking my words to which all may listen and pay attention. Make disciples by following my orders to Baptize in my name. Jesus effectively saves, the Holy Spirit causes us to know and trust God’s truth.

We who listen and pay attention to his powerful promise given in Holy Baptism are restored and returned to be belonging to God.

Jesus came to save people and nations by his resurrection promise. Twice in these few words Jesus is taught as a servant who was born **‘from the womb.’** God himself would not just be a servant who came to live, but a servant who came to die. God himself does something so big by his Amazing Grace to cause spiritual restoration and salvation to be given to faraway, coastland nations and even to souls who live at the ends of the earth. Jesus is a Savior for all people, all souls need God to come to our rescue.

And rescue Jesus has! It would have been too small for God to rescue in such a great way for only one little blood-line one heritage of Abraham. Abraham is a father of nations in a true sense that God gave him faith – God gives faith to many different peoples, just like he gave Abraham, to share in a mutual inheritance of life everlasting. We belong with Abraham to God by faith. We belong with Abraham to God by grace.

Verse 6 shows the immensity of God’s salvation accomplished. We are raised up and restored by the one who died on the cross but then on his day of Resurrection Jesus restored to live, body and soul, forever and never die again. By God’s gift of belonging to Jesus through Holy Baptism we also will die once and in that very moment be taken into the **‘hands of our heavenly Father.’** God raises us up out of sin through Holy Baptism and restores the ones to whom he speaks to through these words of Isaiah. Listen, pay attention, God generously pours out his gift of the Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism to save all who trust in the Word of God.

When God through Isaiah says, **“my salvation will be known”** notice that God doesn’t say we will feel his salvation. That’s important in a world that cares more about how people feel than about what people know. I can’t change this cultural shift in which we live. Today’s lesson from Romans 6 helps with this too. It says in verse 3, **“or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”** Baptized into Jesus’ death is a gift of grace. Jesus took our death and did it. Jesus gives us his life and he does it.

Believing is trusting, believing is knowing, believing is depending on God and on nothing we feel that can so quickly change.

Verse 3b talks about ‘glory.’ We believe and know that the cross is a universal display of God’s glory. Glory because Jesus’ identity is hidden even inside of it. As Jesus’ life on the cross was being poured out like water God was pouring out salvation to all the nations on earth.

Listen to God speaking in the Bible, pay attention you people whom Jesus loves - Baptism brings us closer to God. God brings us closer to listen to him, to pay attention to his salvation – to know that Jesus is the one who displays God’s glory from an empty cross and a vacant tomb. I can’t explain why God hides himself in his means of Grace. I merely know that that is what the Bible teaches about, **“he hid me in the shadow of his hand.”** (2b)

God’s Word continues what Holy Baptism begins – we return to listen, we return to pay attention, we return to be raised, restored and saved by God’s powerful will and word. Eternal life is a reward that Jesus brings through faith formed by God through Holy Baptism.

God brings faith through Baptism to know that Jesus is the one to whom we cling, to whom we hold. For Jesus we give thanks to God for his gift of Holy Baptism. Jesus who did not need Baptism obeyed perfectly in our place. We who do need Baptism have Jesus’ perfect obedience given to us in such a generous way. The glory of God is hidden to those who do not believe in the means of grace. The glory of God is revealed to those who do believe that by the means of grace God rewards and restores us to be rightful heirs of heaven.

The Bible is a Miracle to which we listen and pay attention. Holy Baptism is a miracle by which God does so much to restore us to himself, raise us up by faith and bring his reward of forgiveness from the very cross of Jesus the servant Israel.

We belong to God as his new Israel, as his new Jacob by God who forms faith in all who are Baptized. Faith is a miracle given by God through Holy Baptism. Faith brings us to know against any kind of feeling to listen to God, pay attention to these words that restore us back to be ever closer to God himself.

Historical-fiction is reliving a certain past from an alternative standpoint as an author plugs a self-made story into a historical context. One of my favorite historical-fictional movies is Forrest Gump. In that film Forrest says, "stupid is as stupid does." Ever since I first heard that I've used it many times since.

But isn't the opposite just as true? "smart is as smart does." Today as we pay attention to God's Word we are reminded of his gift of Holy Baptism "Miracle is as Miracle does" is what God ultimately says to us in the Bible.

Miracle is as Miracle does. Baptism is God's miracle. God's verdict is declared to us by Jesus' payment and labor to save. Miracle water is given by God's command of Holy Baptism in his name.

In his name. Amen.