

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – Year A – January 16, 2011  
Based on Isaiah 42:1-7 – written by Pastor Paul Horn, Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
“Behold the Servant of the LORD! He provides justice through Baptism.”

There is no denying that Daniel Hernandez is a hero. The 20-year-old intern helped to save Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' life after last weekend's deadly shooting in Arizona. Hernandez, who had been working for Giffords for just five days, rushed to the congresswoman's side after the shooting and rendered first aid to Giffords and others on the scene.

There is no denying that the Servant of the LORD described by the prophet Isaiah is a hero. Just look at the way the LORD speaks about him. He says, “**Behold my Servant!**” With the very first word the LORD taps us on the shoulder and says, “I am pointing you to something worth seeing. Pay attention!” Look at my Servant!

Isaiah gives us more clues to the Servant's identity... “**Behold my Servant whom I uphold.**” The LORD will give aid and help to his Servant so he will be successful in his work. The LORD calls his Servant “**my chosen one in whom I delight.**” This phrase sounds a lot like the words the Father spoke from heaven when Jesus was baptized by John. Out of all the people in the world, the LORD selected this one person specifically for this special work. The LORD chooses this person because there is nothing in him that displeases the LORD. He delights in him. Finally the LORD says, “**I will put my spirit on him.**” After listening to the Gospel and the Second Lesson and reading the context of this section of Scripture, it is not too hard to figure out who the Servant of the LORD is: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, chosen by God from eternity, anointed by the Holy Spirit at his Baptism.

Just what exactly is the Servant's task? Isaiah tells us, “**He will bring justice to the nations.**” Typically kings and rulers bring justice through force. But the Servant of the LORD doesn't bring justice this way. In fact, the justice he brings is not the justice we might be thinking of; revenge on enemies, the punishment of rebels and traitors etc.

If we continue reading vs2-4 we see that the Servant will establish justice with gentleness, especially toward those who are bruised and look like a candle about to be blown out. The Gentiles (non-Jews) would put their trust in this justice. The Servant will establish justice by making himself a covenant with the people. Through this justice the Servant becomes a light for the Gentiles, he opens the eyes of the blind and leads them from the darkness of their prison.

This justice isn't revenge, it isn't punishment. The word Isaiah uses for *justice* in the Hebrew language is the content of a judge's decree. What kind of judge's decree brings forgiveness, comfort, pardon and peace? It is the Judge's acquittal! The only good news a judge can bring is that the accused is declared innocent. The work of the Servant of the LORD is to bring about this declaration of innocence.

The Servant's mission is about as difficult as convincing the judge that Jared Lee Loughner is not guilty. The Servant of the LORD is tasked with convincing the Judge of all creation that sinners are declared not guilty.... because, according to the justice of the law, God's law, the world has been found guilty.

The LORD tells all people, young and old, men and women and children, to be perfect just as he is. Just looking at the evidence that all people are born into this world with a sinful nature is enough to bring about our guilt and punishment. Then on top of that, God examines our works. He showed us why he delights in his Servant. What does he expect of us as his servants? To serve him by serving others. So often we like to turn God's wishes for us around and serve ourselves, don't we? He expects us to serve others with humility, we act like kings and queens and all others are peasants that ought to be bowing down to us. God expects us to serve others with kind words, forgiveness and love. Too often we speak to each other with nasty words, with anger and an unforgiving attitude.

Just as the simple act of pulling a trigger is enough to sentence someone to death, this evidence alone, on just this one part of our lives, servanthood, is enough for God to find us guilty; to sentence us to the eternal prison, with no chance for parole. There is no fine that we can pay for our release. And just as we cannot fathom the thought of a judge exonerating the shooter in Tuscan for his heinous crime, is there a judge who would do the same for us?

That's the mission of the Servant of the LORD: to establish justice on the earth, to provide justification; a judge's verdict of "not guilty." Even though all the people of the world, that includes you and me, are found guilty and condemned to death, even though the Servant knows that he must become the guilt of the world, even though he knows he must receive our just condemnation, Isaiah shows us his determination to accomplish his work, "**He will not falter or be discouraged.**" (vs4)

Later on his book, the prophet Isaiah describes how the Servant of the LORD accomplished his mission (53:4-6, 10a, 11).

**<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. <sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

The world is found guilty, condemned to death, standing before the tribunal of God. Also standing before the same court is the innocent Servant of the LORD. But the Judge does not charge the people of the world with their guilt. He charges the blameless Servant of the LORD of our sin. He becomes the one who is guilty of pride, of laziness, selfishness. He becomes the guilt bearer. In return, he takes the Servant's innocence and gives it to us. The Judge provides a declaration of innocence for all people.

It's big news when a famous athlete or movie star goes to trial, especially when the jury finally reaches a verdict. Do you remember the headline of your local newspaper when OJ Simpson was found innocent? In big, bold letters the title read, "OJ Simpson, Not Guilty." When he was found guilty of robbery not too long ago, the headlines read, "The Juice, Squeezed." The Servant of the LORD has even bigger, more important

news to proclaim. He wants people from every nation to hear about it, more than that, he wants the people of the nations to know that this ruling of innocence is theirs.

In the days of Isaiah and Jesus, news was spread by messengers who went to the towns and verbally shouted the news to its citizens. Today, you might think of a charismatic preacher who yells and pounds his fist on the podium. Jesus doesn't come that way. He speaks gently. And by his calm, soothing Word, he effectively plants the gospel in your heart through these tender words, **"I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** Through your baptism, Jesus speaks softly and gently, because he brings a message of hope and forgiveness, the gift of eternal life and salvation. It is through your baptism that you receive Christ Jesus' justice which he provided by his life and death. Through your baptism, the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith, faith receives the Judge's pronouncement, "You are not guilty of your sins. You have been set free from your punishment. You have been released from hell's prison forever." Baptized into Christ means that all that Christ has done is yours. Your sins became his; his innocence became yours. Your punishment became his; his death became yours. His resurrection is yours. His heaven is yours.

What a precious gift baptism is! Especially when we feel like that bruised reed or dimly lit candle Isaiah spoke about in our lesson. We grow weary carrying out our roles as servants of Christ. We know how Christ wants us to serve others, and we want to serve others that way, but so many times we falter. The Christian hears the announcement of forgiveness, but guilt that is hidden away still hurts. The Christian hears God's promise that he is always with his people, but at times feels all alone. But Jesus promises, when your heart is convicted, when you're losing it, and can't take it anymore, Jesus is not going to blow out your candle, he will not snap you in half (vs3), instead he will straighten you out and strengthen you, he will rekindle your flame.

So when your sins and conscience oppress you, and you feel weak, you will take comfort and say, "I am baptized. Since I am baptized, it is promised to me that I am forgiven. Eternal life is mine. For in baptism, Christ is mine and I am his."

There is no denying that the four individuals who subdued Jared Lee Loughner are heroes. Three men and a 61 year-old woman stood up and put their own lives at risk, stopping the carnage, saving lives. There is no denying that Jesus Christ is the greatest hero, the Savior of the world. He is the faithful Servant of the LORD, who stood up and gave his own life in our place. What a treasure we have in the Servant of the LORD! May we live as his faithful servants now and forever in his courts in heaven. Amen!