**Isaiah 42:1-7** January 15, 2017

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*Isaiah 42:1“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. 2He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. 3A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; 4he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law the islands will put their hope.”*

*5This is what God the Lord says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 6“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Not everyone cares about sports. A question to see how interested you are in sports might be, “When is the NFL draft?” If you could not care less about sports you ask, “What is the NFL draft?” If you are sort of interested in sports, like me, you would have to look it up. But if you are obsessed with sports you answer, “This year the NFL draft is April 27th to 29th.” To you, draft day is more interesting than the Superbowl.

At the time of the NFL draft, each team looks at itself and asks, “What do we need?” It might go something like this: “We have a good quarterback, but we need an offensive line to protect him. Or, we need a running game to balance his passing game.” “What do we need?” is the crucial question. The second question is, “Who can fill that need? Whom can we draft?” The pro scouts go through dozens of colleges and thousands of players to find the player who matches their need.

But that’s sports. Sports add fun to life. But we could live without it. Some of you might doubt it, but you would survive. Think of today’s reading as the announcement of the first draft pick. Not by an NFL team, but by God himself.

**Looking for the Perfect Draft Pick**What do we need? What options are out there?

An honest assessment of humanity reveals that we need *something*. The crime in this world, the loneliness many feel even though there are 7.5 billion people on this world, the self-centeredness that defines people, these all tell us that we need something. The spectre of death hangs over us. The question of what comes after the grave plagues us. We suffer under pangs of conscience when we mess up. We know our inability to live up to our own standards, much less God’s – these all tell us that we need something.

God knows this. He knew it before we were born. And because he is the God who created us, he is concerned. As a heavenly Father, God asked himself, “What do my children need? What options are out there?” Now God knows the answer before the question is asked. But let us imagine, if you will, what God’s draft day considerations might have looked like.

Our need is obvious. We need forgiveness for our sins on a personal level and a world-wide level. Our reading describes us as blind captives, slaves of sin. We sit under the condemnation of all that we have done wrong. We need a Savior from sin, and someone who will empower us with a new life.

So what options are out there?

I wonder if God ever considered a super-hero –strong enough to stop the strongest bad guy, fast enough to race around the world in an instant. Sounds silly, but with God’s almighty power, all options are on the table. Wouldn’t this be a good one? God did not choose a superhero.

God could have chosen a king and conqueror to rescue us. Sort of like a superhero, but more realistic. Someone who could defeat our enemies and relegate them to the trash bin of history. Someone who would punish the wrong-doer while protecting the upright. A conqueror strong enough to protect people from any threat. But God didn’t choose a king and conqueror.

Or God could have chosen a supergenius philosopher. Someone so wise that they would make the wisest laws with no negative impacts. Help for people that would create no dependencies. Law and order without a shade of discrimination. But God didn’t choose that either.

These are the draft picks *we* would have made if we were in the business of saving humanity. But listen to God’s pick: ***“Here is my servant.”***

A servant? A superhero, a conqueror, a supergenius, a servant: Which of these things is not like the others?

You know, God chose a servant for a reason. If you have been a Christian for a long time, if you are used to the cycle of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost – then you, like me, probably take for granted that our Savior is a servant. But to the outsider that is very strange! A servant?

God could have drafted a king, a conqueror, a superhero, a supergenius, a knight in shining armor—who knows what? But God’s pick, with live cameras and microphones … his grand announcement of his first round draft pick for the Savior of the World is, ***“Here is my servant.”*** And our human nature sits here thinking, “That’s not what we need! This isn’t the best pick out there.”

We have to ask, “Why? Why did God choose a servant?”

Have you ever heard this in your house: “Would you please pick up those dishes and put them in the dishwasher?” “I didn’t get them out, he did. He should put them in the dishwasher.” Of course this never happens in our house. I just have a wild imagination. Why is it so vexing to pick up someone else’s dishes? Because we have this inate hatred of serving others. Now there is more to it than that. But that is the biggest reason.

But we did not leave a couple dishes lying around, we broke God’s law, again and again, day in and day out. And making up for each of those sins is not the horrific experience of carrying a cereal bowl across the room and putting it in a dishwasher, but our messes of sin require pain and imprisonment and death. The only person who could ever clean up our messes is a servant so utterly committed to service that we cannot imagine it!

What a beautiful servant this servant of the Lord is!

Perhaps, if you were a fan of *Downton Abbey* over the past few years, you have an appreciation for servants that you did not have. Think about the good servant. Is verse 2 not the definition of a good servant? ***“He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets”*** (2). A servants is supposed to blend into the woodwork. A servant is to be barely seen, and certainly not heard. But a servant must be ever present. His job is to smooth over the unforeseen circumstance and to take a bit of abuse without a complaint. A good servant ***“will not shout or cry out.”*** The Servant of the Lord, our Savior, did not. When insulted, he returned no insult. When suffering and dying for the sins of others, the Bible says, *“as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”* (Is 53:7). No complaint about the unfairness of it all. That’s not what good servants do!

Jesus was a servant. While Jesus was a humble servant, he was not person who kept to himself, isolating himself from the world. His humility extended outward toward others. Think about the picture language from our reading, ***“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out”*** (3). This servant’s concern is for those whose “inner and outer life is only hanging by a slender thread.”[[1]](#endnote-1) He considers their needs first, their hurts, their disasters, their depression, their worries. Even dying on the cross, his concern was not a protest over the injustice done to him, but his concern was for his mother, for the soldiers, for the thief next to him.

Thirdly, the Lord’s servant is tireless, ***“He will not falter or be discouraged”*** (4). A conqueror, a king, a superhero, a supergenius, still essentially follow their own desires and plans. They serve on their own terms. A servant serves the desires and plans of others.

When Isaiah spoke these words one could not really know what this meant. But watch Jesus in his tireless pursuit of your salvation. How often did his disciples wake up in the morning, to find Jesus not in the house. They went out looking for him, only to find him praying in a secluded place. How often people came to Jesus looking for help, and he turned none away. When he stood with Judas whom Jesus knew would betray him, months before the dirty deed, Jesus did not falter. When warned that Herod was trying to kill him, Jesus did not turn around. When the servant of the Lord could have called twelve divisions of angels to prevent his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, he did not order them in. No, the servant of the Lord was the ultimate servant. Verse 4 says, ***“He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.”*** He did not falter until he had established justice for all the earth, until he offered his life as a sacrifice. He served to the bitter end of his life, so that the Almighty judge can look at our sins, and look at the payment that Jesus made for our sins, slam his gavel down on the podium and declare about us, “Not Guilty!”

The perfect servant:***“He will not raise his voice in the streets.”*** The perfect servant: ***“A smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”*** The perfect servant: ***“He will not falter till he establishes justice.”***

Today is the Sunday of the year when, every year, we celebrate the baptism of our Lord. In most years, we rightly focus on the meaning of Baptism in our lives. And we should.

However, Jesus’ baptism is a multi-faceted event. There are many different truths we can take from it. This year, we look at Jesus’ baptism as it fulfilled another purpose.

Jesus was the perfect servant. So much so, that the people around him did not recognize him. There had been angels at his birth, wise men at his infancy. But still none knew the adult Jesus as the servant of the Lord. Do your remember who was sent ahead of the Savior to prepare his way? Yes, John the Baptist. But even John the Baptist *“gave this testimony… I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he…” I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God’”* (John 1:32-34). That was John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.

And then again, do you remember the sermon from several weeks ago? In that reading John the Baptist asked, *“Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else.”* (Mt 11:3) Even though God had pointed out Jesus as the Savior of the world to John the Baptist, he was confused by the servant-nature of Jesus. He had to ask, “Are you really God’s Chosen Savior? Really? You don’t look like it! A servant?”

Today that is the facet of the Baptism of Jesus that we look at: that at the same time as his baptism, God identified Jesus as the chosen servant. So perfect a servant was he that God had to declare it publicly in a way that none could miss: *“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”* (Mt 3:16-17). And then the heavens closed, the voice was silent, and the dove disappeared.

Fellow Christians, learn about the hiddenness of God in his servant. Realize that God does not save by the mighty things of this world, that he is not pleased to save us by a plan that only a supergenius could understand. He was pleased to save us by a servant, a humble, caring, tireless Savior.

And now remember the words of our Savior, the servant of the Lord: *“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve… If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all”* (Mt 20:26-28; Mk 9:35). Amen.

1. Delitzsch, *Isaiah, Vol. II*, 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)