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The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 7, 2021

Jesus Came to Earth with Healing and Love

The people in Israel noticed that Jesus was an amazing teacher who, unlike their rabbis, spoke about spiritual issues that really mattered. Jesus also backed up his authority with amazing miracles as we see in the Gospel today. As Jesus had the power to heal diseases and cast out demons, so he continues to have power to help us in spiritual afflictions.

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| First Reading | Isaiah 42:1-7 The Lord gives strength and power to the weary. |
| Second Reading | 1 Peter 5:6-11 Resist the devil and stand firm in faith. |
| Gospel | Mark 1:29-39 Jesus heals the sick and drives out the demons. |
| Sermon | Isaiah 42:1-7 |

Just wait till your dad gets home. My mother was not afraid to punish my brothers and me when we did something bad, but there was something extra hard about dad's punishment. It wasn't the punishment; it was the wait. So, while I waited, I would think of what might happen. The anticipation of the punishment was just as bad as the punishment. During the wait, I wouldn't only think about what my dad would do, but also about what I did and regret it. The closer it got to when dad got home from work, the worse my fear would get. If that is how it feels with a parent, you can only imagine what it feels like with God.

The people of Judah were in a similar situation, after years of idolatry and abandoning God, God was going to punish them, but they had to wait. He revealed how they would be punished in the first half of Isaiah, many of them were going to die. The rest were dragged away to slavery in another country. So, the people lived anticipating and fearing this punishment as I did as a child. Undoubtedly, they would have despaired, because they knew there was nothing they could do to change what was going to happen. They were afraid.

How often does this happen to us as well? We commit a sin and our heart immediately sinks into our stomach because we wronged another (including God) and we know we are in trouble. Just like a child that played too hard in the living room and broke a lamp, it's only a matter of time until punishment comes. Your loose lips damage and sink relationships. Your strong opinions separate you from friends at a time they need your support. How about the sins that you know it is only a matter of

time till someone knows? Dreading the day someone will discover them and even realizing God already knows about it. When you realize it's too late, despair sets in. The kicker is that you put yourself in that position. Your action has consequences, especially in your relationship with God.

Yet, what does God do in that moment of despair and fear? God comforts you, just as he did the Israelites. They were afraid and despaired like the child waiting for dad to get home, knowing there is nothing they could do to get out of the punishment, and rightfully so! Yet, God lifts their eyes from the judgment to the hope to come. That hope is found in God the Father's plan, revealed in his Son Jesus. He was going to take the consequence of their actions and put them on Jesus. Don't despair, hope in the LORD!

Isaiah 42 is some of the first words describing God's hope found in his servant. Let's look more at that servant. Verse 1, God describes this servant as **"my chosen one"**: God didn't just choose anyone for his plan; he didn't just look around and say, "ehh, I'll choose that guy." He chose the servant that exactly fit the role he needed. Then God the Father empowered him to do that job.

This servant will be quiet and humble in his words and actions. In verse 2, **"He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets."** This servant won't need to be loud, because his message will do all the work. In verse 3, **"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."** He's not going to break the weak or struggling; instead, he comes to calm fearful hearts and put back together broken lives.

Finally, this servant won't stop until the Father's plan is completed. In verse 4, **"he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on the earth."** He is zeroed in and focused. He will bring justice to the Earth.

This servant is Jesus. He didn't yell in Jerusalem to draw attention to himself, but let his Word do the work. He did not crush those who are weak; instead, he patiently worked with the fearful and broken. Jesus was dedicated to his task, he did not stop working and living that perfect life until he died on the cross for you. That is how God brought justice to the world through his servant. Justice can't ignore wrong, because it would be unjust. Wrong and sin needed to be punished to fulfill God's justice. So Christ came and suffered your rightful punishment so God's justice would be fulfilled. At the cross, there was a complete exchange of verdicts, he gave us his not-guilty verdict and he took our guilty verdict. So now, when God the Father sees us, he sees no wrong or sin. This justice goes out to the nations and the ends of the earth to you. All sin has been punished on the cross, there is no punishment left for us.

Therefore, we no longer need to fear. Can you imagine your father getting home, coming upstairs, and telling you that your brother decided to take your punishment for you? That would never have happened in my family and probably yours. But that is what Christ did for you! You can leave your room without fear because there is no punishment waiting for you.

Before further explaining the job of his servant, God the Father reminds us of who he is. Verse 5, God the Father stretched the heavens, spread the Earth, and gave breath to all living things. He is the one who created all things by whom all things exist. These descriptors point to God the Father's power and control over all things. He was the one who created the world and he's the one who will fulfill his plan.

According to that plan, God the Father calls Jesus. However, God the Father doesn't just send Christ, then take a step back and become hands-off. **"I have called you...I will take hold of your hand...I will keep you and will make you."** God the Father continues to help him and empower him to accomplish his plan.

God sent Jesus to be **"a covenant for the people and the light for the Gentiles."** Jesus came for all people, not just the Jews but also all the nations that surrounded them, including those nations that were going to come and take them into captivity. Jesus came for all people; no one is forgotten or excluded in God's plan.

Jesus came **"to open the eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release those who sit in darkness."** Jesus gave sight to the blind. However, we don't have any recorded instances of Jesus releasing someone from prison while he was here on earth. So, don't just have a physical earthly fulfillment, but a greater spiritual fulfillment. Sin blinds and darkens our hearts. Sin takes people captive through addictions, pet sins, or ignorance of God's law. But, Jesus came to open the eyes of sinners to help them see the truth of God's word. He showed them not only their sin but even more so what he did for their sin. Jesus released them from the chains and bondage of sin that took them captive. God the Father sent his servant with the express purpose of releasing people from sin and bringing them into the light.

Jesus continues to do this today! Through his Word and messengers, Jesus continues to come and highlight your sin. Then, he points to the greater truth that he has suffered the punishment for your sin already! He continues to remind you that you are free! Nothing can change that.

Don't stay in your room in disbelief over what your brother did for you. Live your life in thankfulness for what he did for you. When you are afraid, look at God's servant and what he did for you. Amen.

Vicar Mark Zondag