

December 20, 2015

The National Presbyterian Church

A Servant Is Born: "Born to Bless"

Isaiah 55:1-13

David A. Renwick

Today's brief sermon is the conclusion to our series of sermons that we've been pursuing through the season of Advent, in which we've been looking together at the last 15 to 20 Chapters of the book of the prophet Isaiah, which speak of God sending *a servant of God* into the world. Sometime in the future, says Isaiah in various ways, God will send his servant into the world, a descendent of Israel's greatest king, David.

- Sometimes this servant seems to be corporate – more than an individual. Sometimes the servant seems to be “the whole people of God.” And true! Everybody in God's people, and our communal life together is to reflect the life of a servant.
- On the other hand, sometimes this servant is clearly portrayed as an individual. In fact when the first Christians read the book of the prophet Isaiah and these particular chapters and they read about this servant of God they immediately turned their thoughts to Jesus and said ‘this is the servant. The Jesus we know is the servant prophesied hundreds of years ago by Isaiah. Indeed, we know from the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel that Jesus himself read Isaiah 61:1-2, and patterned his ministry after the description of the servant that we find there: someone who has come to bring justice to the peoples, the light of God to all the nations.

So we know that these passages were important for the first Christians and we've been turning back to them again as we think about the one who is born for us. Jesus is born to be a servant.

- Jesus born in humility, not holding on to the fact that he is God should be honored by everyone, but humbling himself and taking the form of a servant to live in our midst (see especially Philippians 2).
- And Jesus as a servant comes to heal. We thought about this servant as somebody who comes to heal, especially through suffering. Sometimes the healing of our broken relationships comes not when we force an issue but when we are willing to sacrifice and to suffer. And so it is with this servant.
- And we've been thinking about this servant as one who comes for all. Not just for an inner group, but for all. For those who feel as if they're on the boundary or outside of the

boundary of life. And sometimes we may feel that we're not quite on the inside. Everybody else is, but we're not. Well in fact all of us are not, at least in one sense: most of us here are Gentiles not Jews. It was not obvious to begin with that when God's servant came he would come for Gentiles, for people like you and me. But what the scriptures tell us, what Isaiah said, is that this servant comes for all the peoples, for all the nations. And so we're included! And the knowledge of God's grace which includes us should effect the way we include others in our lives.

So this servant comes for all. This servant comes to heal. He comes in humility. And today just a quick word that he comes to bless. He comes to bless. He comes to bring us the goodness of God. Or as Jesus would say in the 10th Chapter of John's gospel, he comes *to give us life in all its abundance*. He comes to give us life in all its abundance.

Now some people find this very easy believe – that God wants the best for our lives. We take it in some senses for granted. As if to say, “Of course this is what God wants for us!” And Isaiah wants to assure us in our passage that this is what God wants for us. God wants our best.

But some of those who believe this easily and know that God wants the best for our lives forget that the God who longs to bless us is also the God who calls us to repent, to change our ways for God, our thoughts, our sense of direction in life. They say, ‘My life is okay, more or less! God, come along with me.’ They want to hitch God to their life as they go in their own direction. Whereas Isaiah says Chapter 55:6,7, that's not the way it works. If you want God's blessing you need to turn around and go in God's direction:

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near.

(Don't take for granted that he can be found, or that he is near).

Let the wicked forsake their way and their unrighteous, their thoughts.

*Let them return to the Lord that he may have mercy on them
and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.*

So the call of Isaiah is to receive the blessing of God, but that blessing only comes when we turn in God's direction. Not merely asking God to follow us as we go our own way. Do you remember what Jesus the servant says? He says, “Follow me!” It's his direction that we must seek if we want this blessing. And some who believe God wants to bless us, forget this call to repentance, this call to turn our lives around in God's direction.

But then there are some people who really cannot believe, find it in themselves to believe that God really wants to bless them, to do them good. Life has been hard; life has been difficult. They look at all the troubles in the world and they cannot believe in the goodness of God. Or they look at their own weakness and their own sin and say it cannot be that God wants to bless me. I'm not in there in the circle of blessing. And to such people as these Isaiah writes (in the 55th Chapter) to remind us that when the servant is born, he is born to bless, to do us good, and the words of blessing, roll off his tongue. In the passage below, I've highlighted and bolded the number of words about God's blessing that roll off Isaiah's tongue.

Isaiah 55:1-13

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and **you that have no money**, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not **satisfy**?
Listen carefully to me,
and eat what is good,
and **delight yourselves** in rich food.
³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so **that you may live**.
I will make with you **an everlasting covenant**,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has **glorified** you.
⁶**Seek the Lord** while he may be found, **call upon him** while he is near;
⁷let the wicked **forsake their way**, and the unrighteous their **thoughts**;
let them **return** to the Lord, that he may have **mercy** on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly **pardon**.
⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹so shall **my word be that goes out from my mouth**;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall **accomplish that which I purpose**,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
¹²For you shall go out in **joy**,
and be led back in **peace**;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into **song**,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
¹³**Instead of the thorn** shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall **not be cut off**.

Isaiah speaks to those who find it hard to believe that God is FOR them!

- He says “If you don't have any money” (and none of us have enough money, as it were, to earn God's favor), here are the things that God wants to give as gifts to you.

- He wants to bring you a satisfaction that the world cannot bring.
- He wants you to feel as if life is a banquet in which you have rich food and in which (unlike some of us at Christmas) we don't eat too much, just the right amount, and so the joy remains, and we have a sense of delight.
- He wants to glorify us when other people may forget us. God says you're the one that I want to honor; he wants to give to us mercy he wants to give to us pardon.
- He says that he wants to accomplish his purpose in us, his will through us, so that our lives are not meaningless and they don't drift. He wants to give us a purpose within our lives which comes from his word.
- He wants to give to us joy and peace, words we often use at this time of the year.
- And he wants to fill our lives with a song. Do you feel as if your life is filled with a song that will not go away?
- *Instead of the thorn shall come up the Cyprus, instead of the briar shall come up the Myrtle.* The curse that is full and on humankind because of sin God wants to remove from our lives in order to bless us again and again and again.

In all kinds of ways – and Jesus picks up on this, God says to us “for you I want abundant life, the best life possible; and this life comes through the servant whom I will send to you.”

Believe this good news of the gospel.

- If you find it easy to believe – don't take it for granted, and don't forget to repent!!
- If you find it hard to believe – well, believe it anyway. Be so influenced and affected by the grace of God toward you that your whole direction will change.

And when you get those two things in balance – the grace of God and the call to repentance – his blessing will be made manifest in your life. And when this is the case, our lives in turn become a blessing to others. The gift we receive becomes a gift that we can give. Surely that's what all of us want. Lives in which we received but through which God gives to others. This is his call; this is his blessing through the servant whom he has sent. Born in humility; born to heal; born for all; and born to bless.

David A. Renwick Copyright © 2015 All Rights Reserved.

To listen on line go to: <http://nationalpres.org/~natio100/sermons>
To watch full services go to: <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/nationalpres>

THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
 4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016
www.NationalPres.org 202.537.0800