

## SCRIPTURE

### Isaiah 49:1–7

Listen to me, O coastlands,  
pay attention, you peoples from far away!  
The Lord called me before I was born,  
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

2 He made my mouth like a sharp sword,  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow,  
in his quiver he hid me away.

3 And he said to me, "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

4 But I said, "I have labored in vain,  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;  
yet surely my cause is with the Lord,  
and my reward with my God."

5 And now the Lord says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
and that Israel might be gathered to him,  
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,  
and my God has become my strength—

6 he says,  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

7 Thus says the Lord,  
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,  
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,  
the slave of rulers,  
"Kings shall see and stand up,  
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,  
because of the Lord, who is faithful,  
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

**Psalm 40:1-11**

I waited patiently for the Lord;  
he inclined to me and heard my cry.

2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.

3 He put a new song in my mouth,  
a song of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the Lord.

4 Happy are those who make  
the Lord their trust,  
who do not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after false gods.

5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;  
none can compare with you.  
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,  
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,  
but you have given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.

7 Then I said, "Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

8 I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation;  
see, I have not restrained my lips,  
as you know, O Lord.

10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,  
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;  
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness  
from the great congregation.

11 Do not, O Lord, withhold  
your mercy from me;  
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness  
keep me safe forever.

### **John 1:29-42**

#### **The Lamb of God**

29 The next day he[John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

32 And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

#### **The First Disciples of Jesus**

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). 42 He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

## MESSAGE: I WILL SING

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

The bible is a wonderful collection of books. There's all kinds of stuff in here: there's history, poetry, prayers, visions, inspirations, and encouragements. There is also a fair bit of instruction, correction, and admonition. Those parts we tend not to like as much; often we skip through them quickly, or even better – we think of someone else.

'My wife really ought to read this,' we think. Or my children, my neighbour. We sometimes even enjoy figuring out who certain verses are meant for.

Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employers.

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful person without good sense.

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to the mouth.

Like a dog who returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly.

As a door turns on it's hinges, so does a lazy person in bed.

Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self control.

Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult.

A wise person builds their house, but the foolish tear it down with their own hands.

This one seems to sum up the entire internet. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion.

The point is, these verses are always about someone else. We like the ones that speak of the wise and the righteous, but the tougher ones – they're for you. Not me.

Although, when we're being completely honest, even the complementary verses don't seem to apply to us.

Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it. I'd like to think that is me, but I'm not sure that I have a fountain of life welling up within me.

I guess, when it comes right down to it, a lot of the time we read the bible as though it is written for and about someone else. It's an old book that we keep around because we're fond of it, but not too attached really.

It's a little bit like an old relative that we see at family gatherings – mostly pleasant, sometimes a source of wisdom and perspective, sometimes kind of racist or sexist – a product of a different age, a different time. But overall, not really with it, not really relevant.

This is our view of the bible much of the time. It's easily dismissible as a product of a bygone age that was written for other people. Some parts of it especially so, and I would suggest that today's readings seem particularly unapplicable to most people sitting in the pews.

Isaiah writes of the suffering servant, we don't really know who the psalm is about but it certainly doesn't sound much like our lives, and gospel centers around John the Baptist, Jesus, and some disciples.

All of these scriptures seem to be about superheroes, men who counsel the nations about weighty matters, speaking truth to power. We live in Norfolk. It's the centre of my universe, but in the eyes of the world we're not even significant enough to have a Greyhound bus pass through. What do we know about being a light to the nations? What kings will rise at our presence, or princes bow down? Why are we even reading these particular passages this morning?

Let's go through them and find out.

The Isaiah reading is one of the servant songs – the second of four songs/hymns that describe to us the suffering servant. From our perspective as Christians we tend to quickly say that the suffering servant is Jesus, and that these hymns are about him.

There is some utility in thinking so, we can read this as a prophetic text that foretells the coming of the saviour. But there has to be more to it than that. Isaiah wrote to the Israelite people who were exiled to Babylon, who were desperately seeking a word and an action by God.

It would be a cruel God indeed who would respond to the cries of his people by saying 'Don't worry, I'll send my Son to set you free. It will be in about five hundred years. You know, a thousand years as a day and all that.'

There is clearly more to this song of the servant than a straightforward prophecy of Jesus. What if it is actually about you? What if this scripture hits a lot closer to home than you think?

Let's step through it together.

The Lord called me before I was born,  
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.

We know God has perfect foreknowledge – have you ever considered that God didn't just plan out the famous people, but you as well? The Creator of the universe knew all about you before you were even aware of yourself.

Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. You are not flying under the radar, nor are you inconsequential. You are part of something that began before you were born.

He made my mouth like a sharp sword,  
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;  
he made me a polished arrow,  
in his quiver he hid me away.

After being called, we go through a time of formation. Think of the image, God shielding you with his hand as he polishes you and shines you, making your mouth like a sharp sword. That's not the same as having a sharp tongue that causes dissention. It means placing his word in your mouth. The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The mouth like a sword is about having the discernment and wisdom that comes from ingesting God's word.

After this careful preparation, God places you in a quiver – with a group of similar people who have likewise been protected, polished, and prepared for use.

Next God says "You are my servant,  
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

That's a big statement. We glorify God?

So we reply "I have labored in vain,  
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."

This is repentance – saying to God what I've been doing with my life so far is inconsequential. I've been satisfying my own desires and doing my own thing – how can you say that you will be glorified in me? I'm not worthy of something like that.

So far this is looking like a fairly typical Christian journey, no? Call, preparation in the Word, repentance.

Next comes mission.

And now the Lord says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to bring Jacob back to him,  
and that Israel might be gathered to him,

for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,  
and my God has become my strength.

God answers our claims of inadequacy, our confession that we aren't fitting vessels for his glory, by reminding us 'Hey, I made you. I declare that you are honorable in my sight, and I am your strength. You're not doing this on your own, we're doing this together.'

So, go bring Jacob back to me, gather up all of Israel. And we think, wow – our mission is to go to all God's people and call them back. That's a big job. But God is with us, and we've got a whole tribe of us together in this quiver. So we get ourselves pumped up and ready, we're psyched up to go find some people like us – basically good people who have maybe forgotten their roots and their purpose. People who need a bit of a refresher.

Then God said,  
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light to the nations,  
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Whoa. What is that? Light to the nations? Ends of the earth? Suddenly this job just got a whole lot bigger. But then we go back and recall that when we were feeling inadequate God said Hey, I made you. I declare that you are honorable in my sight, and I am your strength. You're not doing this on your own, we're doing this together.'

Maybe we can be a light to the nations. Maybe the suffering servant isn't only Jesus, but every believer who bears his name. Maybe this scripture really is about us, and we shouldn't be too quick to disregard it.

Especially if we consider that the Psalm this morning follows the same pattern. It begins with us in desolation, a miry bog in which we can make no headway.

God lifts us up, places our feet on solid ground, and then puts a new song in our mouths. There's that word of God again. He opens our ear to the word.

He reassures us when we resist – he shows us in the book of life where it is written about us, reminding us that we are part of a plan much larger than ourselves. We don't operate under our own steam but in the power of God who has already worked out our part and will be our rock and our foundation.

From this position we then proclaim the love and faithfulness of God to the great congregation – the whole world. It's the same pattern of Christian journey. It's about us.

So then, if it is indeed about us and we are called to be a light to the nations, prompting princes to bow down before God, and ensuring that the whole world hears of God's faithfulness and salvation all from this small town of Simcoe – how are we to do that? That's a tall order, where do we even begin?

The gospel we read this morning tells us. The scripture centres on John the Baptist. We remember John, he's the one who was killed for telling Herod that his sham marriage to his brother's wife was sinful. He's the one who was in direct confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees, the priests and the Levites – the rich and powerful of society. Certainly he is a man who does speak to the nations and the ruling elites. His seem like pretty big shoes to fill. I'm not sure that we could live up to his example.

But, what we read about this morning – I could do that. John was out doing his thing and Jesus walked by. John pointed and said 'Look at that guy. I saw the Spirit of God on him – he is the Son of God.'

Again the very next day. 'Look – the Lamb of God.'

That is something that we can all do. Recognize Jesus and point him out. Of course we have to be paying attention to do that. If we're not looking for Jesus we won't be able to pick him out of a crowd.

John was looking. When asked what he was doing down at the river he spoke about the one who was to come. I'm not even worthy to shine his shoes, he said, but it's my job to look for him, and announce him when I see him.

That's our job too. That is how we become a light to the whole world. Look for Jesus. Expect him. Then point him out when we see him.

This week I saw Jesus a few times.

Jesus was present in a young boy this week who asked me 'If we are going to get old and forget everything anyway, then what's the point?'

I heard the voice of Jesus in some messages of encouragement that I received when I found myself at the centre of a little political firestorm a couple days ago.

In London yesterday was a funeral of a young man in which no family were present – only military comrades. And Jesus. Jesus was there.

Jesus dropped by our church this morning while you were all downstairs listening to ..... He came in the form of a young man, one of the folks who drop by for assistance. Today he brought some clothing and some for us to hand out, and left with some ravioli and fruit cups.



His visit was a reminder that we are all whole people made in the image of God. We're not divided into providers and charities. He gave something; he received something. Just like every one of us.

Behold the Lamb of God. This is how we witness to the world. We look for the Son of God. We point him out when we see him. Sometimes that's a lot harder to do than others, but that's our calling and our commissioning. And it is a calling for every one of us, not just some.

He has drawn you up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set your feet upon a rock,  
making your footsteps sure.

He put a new song in your mouth,  
a song of praise.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the Lord.

I speak to you this morning in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.