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Isaiah 49:1-6
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GET TO KNOW YOUR SAVIOR

Every four years on the 20th of January, hundreds of thousands of American citizens flock to Washington D.C. to witness the inauguration of the President of the United States. And, although the only thing the Constitution mandates on that day is that the President take an oath to faithfully carry out his duties as President, the whole day really serves as a “Get To Know You” event as the Commander in Chief officially kicks off his new term of office. Parades, balls, speeches, galas – the day is jam-packed with festivities designed to let the nation get to know their leader a little bit better.

Today, we celebrate an Inauguration Day of sorts, as well. But, as we heard in today’s Gospel, the man who was officially beginning his work was not the President of the United States; it was Jesus of Nazareth. And hundreds of thousands of people did not flock to Jordan’s banks to see this event either; it may have just been John and Jesus standing in the River Jordan that day. And, most importantly, the work that Jesus was officially beginning as he was baptized was not to lead a nation; it was to...well, I’m getting ahead of myself a bit. Instead of me telling you, let’s let Jesus himself tell you about the work he came into this world to do. For in the prophetic words before us this morning from Isaiah chapter 49, we get to eavesdrop on a conversation that took place between the Son of God himself and his heavenly Father. And in this conversation, we get to listen to God’s Son tell us exactly what it was he came into this world to do. Or, more specifically, he tells us exactly what it was that his heavenly Father sent him into this world to do – work that officially kicked off on the day he was baptized. So LET’S GET TO KNOW OUR SAVIOR this morning, first, *through his baptism*, and let’s hear about it in Jesus’ own prophetic words.

(I – Through His Baptism)

As Jesus begins speaking to us about his work in this divine conversation, the first thing he does is assure us that his heavenly Father’s plans for him as he sent him into this world weren’t just something the Father threw together at the last minute. Take a look at verse 1. He begins: **“Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.”**

Did you hear that? Before Jesus was even born in the manger of Bethlehem, his heavenly Father had planned out the work that he would do. And we know that to be true. Jesus’ coming into the world was foretold long centuries before it ever happened. God promised Jesus’ coming to men like David and Solomon a thousand years before it happened. Before that, he made the same promise to the likes of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Before that, to Noah. And before that, Adam and Eve. In fact, even before the creation of the world, God had in mind to send his Son into this world. And yet, as those long ages passed, the Father waited until just the right time to reveal his Son. Listen to how the Son himself describes it in verses 2 and 3. Jesus says, **“He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his**

quiver. He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’”

What a neat picture! As the Old Testament age progressed, Jesus, in this divine conversation, compares himself to something hidden in his Father’s hand and to an arrow concealed in his Father’s quiver. Something that is waiting to be revealed until just the right time – when conditions are perfect. And, on the day of his baptism, the perfect time came. John poured his baptismal waters over his head, and his Father’s voice boomed from the heavens, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** That was the day the Father finally opened his hand to reveal his Son to the world. That was the day the Father finally pulled that long concealed arrow out of his quiver and said, “OK, Son, now is the time to officially start your work.”

Now, what was that work his Father was commissioning him to do? We’ve already said his baptism was much like the Inauguration Day of the President – Jesus officially kicked off his work. And yet we also said that his work was really much different. His work was not to lead a nation. His Father had much greater plans for him than that. Listen to how Jesus continues in verse 5 because there he tells us exactly what it was his Father sent him to do. He says about his Father: **“He...formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.”**

Do you see? Jesus’ work did involve a nation, the nation of Israel, but his work was not to *lead* them. No, Israel needed so much more than a leader. For Israel, God’s chosen people, set apart as his holy nation, had been rebellious. They were given every opportunity to be in fellowship with their God, and yet they despised God’s will by rejecting his commands. They despised God’s Word by rejecting his prophets. They despised God himself by rejecting him and worshipping false gods. The nation of Israel had wandered away from their God, and so what did their God do? In an act that can only be characterized by his love and mercy and grace, he sent his only Son, the one he calls his Servant, **“to bring Jacob back to him and to gather Israel to himself.”** Israel didn’t need a leader. They needed a Savior. And so the God of Israel planned to send that Savior, and then promised to send that Savior, and then, when the perfect time arrived, he pulled him from his quiver. **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** The Father was commissioning his Son for his work: the work of bringing his people back; the work of gathering wandering Israel to himself. Wandering Israel needed a Savior. And so their God gave them one.

Do you ever wonder what Jesus must have felt like as he came up out of the water that day he was baptized? What confidence he must have had! To have his own Father commission him to save Israel with the words, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”** He must have been on top of the world, ready to tackle absolutely anything this world would throw his way.

And yet, there he was, just three years later, on the night before all that work would be finished. Do you remember where he was? He was alone, in the Garden of Gethsemane. His best friends sleeping; his enemies on their way to arrest him; his soul, admittedly, overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death; and his face buried in the dirt, praying to the same heavenly Father who sent him to save Israel, **“Father, take this cup from me.”**

His baptism must have seemed so far away. Yes, on that day, his Father revealed him like an arrow pulled from a quiver. But on this night, as his enemies approached to arrest him, and it was clear his Father was answering that prayer with a

“no,” Jesus must have felt like the dullest arrow ever made – like an arrow that wouldn’t even bruise you if it hit you between the eyes – absolutely unfit to carry out the work his Father sent him to do. In fact, he said as much in the divine conversation recorded for us here. Listen to his words through Isaiah about the anguish he felt that night. In verse 4, God’s Son, the Servant of the Lord, lamented, **“I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.”** Think of it. Three years of ministry; three years of doing his Father’s work; three years of preaching; three years of miracles – and this is what he had to show for his labors? The unavoidable prospect of suffering and death? “Father, this is the work you sent me to do? Surely **“I have labored to no purpose!”** And like an arrow too dull to ever work as intended, he prayed, **“Father, take this cup from me!”** His baptism must have seemed so far away.

And yet, do you remember his attitude as he arose from prayer that night, a prayer his Father answered with a “no”? He wiped the bloody sweat from his brow and walked to meet his betrayer with, well, with the same confidence he had on the day of his baptism! But, how could this be? Such confidence from a man walking to his death? Well, look again at what he said about his Father in verse 2. Jesus remembers, **“He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.”** Jesus walked to meet his betrayer with unparalleled confidence because he knew his Father did not send him to do his work unequipped. For at his baptism, not only did his Father commission him with the work of saving Israel, he also equipped him to do that work – anointing him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He was an arrow alright – but he was not dull and ineffective, he was polished to the finest point. He was sent to do his Father’s work, and because of his baptism he knew he would not fail. For his Father had equipped him with everything he needed to succeed.

And so with the confidence of his baptism, he met his betrayer head on. Then, he was arrested. And not by force – a whole company of Roman soldiers lying motionless on the ground at the sound of his voice was proof of that – he went willingly. And as those soldiers arrested him, again, he did not resist. In fact, when one tried to resist on his behalf, he simply healed the ear and told those 12 legions of angels to stay away. And, again, as he was put on trial, he didn’t stop the whippings, he didn’t speak up against the false accusations, he didn’t retaliate to the mocking. He just took it. And finally, as they hung him on that cross to die, he didn’t jump down from it as some jeered him to do to prove he was the Son of God. He didn’t have to. **He wasn’t sent by his Father to stop whippings and silence accusers and retaliate to mockers. He wasn’t sent by his Father to jump down from crosses just to prove his power. He was sent by his Father to endure it - the whippings, the mocking, the cross, all of it. Because he was sent to save his people.** To quote Isaiah, he was sent to be pierced for Israel’s transgressions, to be crushed for Israel’s iniquities. He was a polished arrow perfectly equipped to endure it all. And so he did it. And as he breathed his last on Calvary’s cross, his punishment brought his people peace. By his wounds they were healed. Jesus’ work was finished, and Israel was gathered to her God.

(II – Through Your Baptism)

Now, what about you? There is no Israelite blood running through your veins. Are you and I simply resigned to marvel at the Savior of Israel’s saving work from a distance? Well, that just seems like too small a thing for our God of grace. After all, our God knew that you and I would have so many similarities to that nation of Israel. That we, too, have so often despised God’s will, despised God’s Word, despised God

himself. That in our utter sinfulness, we, too, have wandered away from our God, and that we, too, desperately needed a Savior from our sins. And so, God sent his Son. Not to *lead* one nation. In fact, not even to *save* one nation. He sent him to *save the world*. Listen, now, to the Father’s part of this divine conversation in Isaiah 49 verse 6. There the Father says to his Son, his Servant: **“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”** One nation? Too small a thing for our God of grace. He sent his Son for the world. He sent his Son for you.

And it’s amazing isn’t it? How God chooses to bring his salvation to the ends of the earth? How God allows you to GET TO KNOW YOUR SAVIOR? He does it through your baptism. I mean, just think about all of the things God himself equipped you with at your baptism. The Scriptures are filled with examples. As the Holy Spirit entered your heart, your stubbornness of unbelief was torn down, and saving faith was created. You were connected to Christ, and all the saving work he did on earth became yours. You were clothed with the righteousness that he won for you through his righteous life. Your sins were washed away. Your sinful nature was drowned. The shackles of the slavery of sin fell off, and you were made a slave to righteousness. You were equipped with everything you need to stand before a holy God and live. You were equipped with forgiveness, with life, with salvation. At your baptism you GOT TO KNOW YOUR SAVIOR.

Remember that, dear Christians. I’m sure there are many times in your life when your baptism seems so far away. Times when temptations seem so great that they are impossible to fight, that you are just a slave to those sins with which you are tempted. During those times of temptation, remember your baptism – the day you were released from the slavery of sin, equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist sin and do the will of God instead. And, then, at those times when you have given in to temptation, when the sins you’ve done seem too great to be forgiven, remember your baptism, that through it you have been connected to Christ, that the work he finished on Calvary’s cross is now yours, that he was pierced for *our* transgressions, he was crushed for *our* iniquities, that his punishment brought *us* peace, that his wounds healed *us*, that you now have forgiveness for the worst you’ve ever done because the blood that flowed on Calvary and the waters that poured over your head at your baptism, they have washed even the worst of your sins away. And, finally, as death approaches, perhaps when your baptism seems the farthest away it has ever been, when it seems as if there is no way you will be able to stand in the presence of your holy God and live – covered with the sins of your youth, the sins of adulthood, the sins of your old age – remember your baptism. Because on that day your filthy rags of sin were removed. You were clothed with the white robes of Christ’s own righteousness. So, stand before your God with the confidence of your baptism, and remember: I now stand before my holy God as his holy child because at my baptism I GOT TO KNOW MY SAVIOR.

Well, we set out to GET TO KNOW OUR SAVIOR this morning. Turns out we already do. We KNOW HIM *through his baptism*. We KNOW HIM *through our own*. And because of it, *you* are now his child, whom he loves. Amen.