

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-6

The Servant is sent not only to restore Israel, but to be the Light of the nations. This was a difficult teaching for God's people in Isaiah's time and it is still a difficult teaching for many Christians today. Last week, we considered the thought that each of us is called to imitate Christ. How is the Christ as the Light of the nations reflected in us?

The Old Testament Jews believed that they were the only people that God loved and the only people that He wanted to bless. By the time of Jesus' birth, their attitude was even worse. Of course, we are never guilty of such an attitude, at least not intellectually guilty. We say all the right words, we are "mission minded," and we even give money so that other nations might hear the gospel news of Jesus. But what about the practical everyday calling to be imitators of Christ in reaching out to other "nations"?

Sometimes it is so comfortable to do our outreach work from within the walls of our churches that we forget that other nations live in our own communities. These are people of different cultural backgrounds, different races, or different financial situations. They may not all be from different countries than ourselves, but they are all different from us and that makes them part of our calling to reach out to the "nations" around us.

Jesus did not work only from inside the walls of the synagogue. He stepped out among the people that surrounded Him and blessed them with His mercy and love. The Samaritan woman, for instance, was of a race that Jews would not even talk to. In fact, they would walk many miles out of their way in order to avoid stepping foot on Samaritan soil. In addition, this person was a woman—the gender of whom Jewish men thanked God daily that they had not been born. Yet Jesus sat with her, reasoned with her, and blessed her with the joy of His presence. Do we sometimes have a Samaritan attitude toward those who are different from ourselves? Or, do we throw open the doors of the church, step out to those *nations* in our own community to bring them by the hand into God's presence?



**Is your Bible study group reaching into your community?**

*(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)*

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Isaiah 49:1-6

1. This is the second "servant song" of Isaiah (last week we focused on Isaiah 42:1-7). Where do we find the servant emphasis in this lesson?
2. According to vs. 1b ("Before I was born . . .") when had God designated Isaiah as His prophet? (See Jeremiah 1:5 for a similar call.)
3. According to vs. 5, who was the "servant" to rescue?
4. According to the second part of vs. 6, who also was to be rescued?
5. Isaiah 49:6 is referred to as one of the "great commissions of the Old Testament." What makes this verse a great commission?
6. God calls each of us to be His Epiphany witnesses. With whom are you sharing the light of Jesus?



## First Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 42:1-7

Jesus the Servant is a concept that we are to emulate, but sometimes we forget what kind of Servant Jesus was. Isaiah describes the Servant, and thus the Servant's servants. He says that "He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street." (vs. 2) "A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish." (vs. 3) He will be a "light to the nations, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeons..." (vs.6-7)

Satan seems to know that his time is growing shorter. His influence over the world is hard to ignore. Through Satan's deception Christians are portrayed as uncaring or as ravaging activists. Satan doesn't want people to hear about the wonderful things that believers do. It can be frustrating. But when we react in anger, or merely become silent, we fuel Satan's bag of lies.

How can we be like the Servant? How can we show the world His reality? Only by who we are every day. Who is the "bruised reed" that should not be broken? Is she the woman seeking forgiveness for an abortion, or perhaps just the poor soul who showed up at church in cut-offs and a sweatshirt? Who is the "dimly burning wick"? Is it a friend who is about to leave Christianity because they just can't believe that God would condemn a Hindu to hell?

How do we meet the challenges of the world? We will never silence Satan's condemnation of our faith, and he will do that through every avenue over which he can have influence, but we can demonstrate that Satan's claims are untrue. We can stand honestly and strongly for what we know is true. We can proclaim the truth that God's mercy is near even in the midst of sin. Our job is not to push people into hell, but to pull them to Christ.

People of the world don't want to believe that Christians can hate sin but love sinners, so our task is not easy, but God is with us and enabling us. He makes us servants of the Servant.



***Study the Gospels to see how Jesus handled unbelievers!***

A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee

## First Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 42:1-7

1. This text is the first of Isaiah's "servant songs." Why is that designation appropriate? Who is The Servant whom Isaiah prophesies?
2. How is the promise of the Spirit's presence (vs. 1) fulfilled in today's Gospel lesson (Mark 1:10)?



3. How was Jesus the fulfillment of a "covenant" (vs. 6)? See Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:6-13?
4. How was Jesus the "light for the Gentiles" (vs. 6)? See John 8:12 and Acts 13:47.
5. How did Jesus fulfill the prophecy of vs. 7?
6. The world cries for justice! In what sense does Jesus bring justice? (vs. 1,3,4)?

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-6

This week's lesson centers on the beginning of what is called the Second Servant Song, a prophecy concerning Jesus the Servant. The Servant Himself speaks in these verses. He describes Himself as being called by God even before His birth. He says that His mouth has been made a sharp sword and that He is God's polished arrow. An entire nation had failed to show God's glory to the nations, but this one Servant would do what Israel had failed to do. The Servant knew that He would accomplish His task, yet He was in part a Man. There were times when the lack of confirmation from His people, persecution from His enemies, rejection by the world that He created, and even the shallow understanding of His followers would leave the Servant tired and drawn. Yet He knew that in God He was vindicated.

That is what we find out about the Servant in verses 1-4, and what an encouragement His words are to those of us who try each day to follow His example of living. No, we can never be perfect as He was perfect, but we see some of ourselves in His words. We also were known and called by God before our births. In our mothers' wombs He already knew who we were and who we would become. He has given us His word as a weapon against the wiles of Satan in our world. We do not need anger or hatred as tools! We have the word of God as our sword and have seen the ultimate Word of God in our midst. We may or may not accomplish the goals that God sets before us but, like the Servant, we know that our salvation is still safe because our Master the Servant has won it for us. We will tire and we will feel frustration, but these are nothing compared to knowing Him.

We know that this is true because in verses 5 and 6 the Servant says that though we were not Israel, not the chosen people of God, out of His love for us God appointed our Lord the Servant to lift us up and to make us God's own. Once we were separated from God but now we are His people in Christ, seeking to be like our Servant-Master. His Holy Spirit is working the change within us each day, making the impossible possible.

**Learn more about serving God in a Bible study this week.**  
*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee.*

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-6

1. Isaiah, God's inspired author, writes as if another is speaking. Who is the Spokesman in this text? Once again we meet the "servant." (vs. 3) Who is the Servant in Isaiah's message?
2. How do verses 1, 2, and 5a indicate that God's action was part of an intentional plan and not an incidental decision by Him? Does God ever act accidentally or incidentally?
3. Would there have been times where Jesus' ministry reflected the words "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing?" (vs. 4) Are there times where we feel the same way about our efforts in the church?
4. "Jacob" and "Israel" (vs. 5) would be led back from captivity in Babylon. From what captivity are we led back?
5. Read Acts 13:46-48. What words do Paul and Barnabas repeat? What is the effect of their message?
6. Vs. 6 is sometimes called the "Great Commission of the Old Testament." What has been God's desire from the beginning of time? How is your church a Great Commission church of the new testament?

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

One of Paul's themes in his letters was the truth that Christians are called to be different. Yes, we are sinners even though we are Christians, but God expects us, as His children, to behave in a Godly manner. In today's lesson, Paul speaks to the constant temptation to give our hearts and bodies over to sexual sin.

Promiscuity, sex before marriage, and adultery are prevalent in our culture. Over the last few decades what was once present but hidden has become accepted and promoted. Many "experts" decry marriage as outdated and restrictive. Some claim that a "dad and mom" family is offensive to those in homosexual relationships. In some school systems children are taught "safe sex" beginning even in junior high school grades and provided condoms to encourage them. Those who promote this "education" claim that kids will "do it anyway" and it's better to have them "safe." Adultery is also an accepted way to self satisfaction when one's spouse just doesn't provide enough thrill. Senior citizens live together as husband and wife without marriage because it is a tax advantage for them, or because it assures the children that an interloper will not receive too much inheritance. All of this and we haven't even mentioned prostitution. Can you imagine the letters that Paul would write if he were dropped into our culture today?

Paul reminded the Corinthians, and us, that no matter what the world accepts as "good" or "acceptable," God says that immoral actions against our bodies are an abomination. We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. He is with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing. These bodies that we inhabit are not our own; they are purchased and owned by our Savior.

Whenever we choose to throw our bodies on the heap of infidelity or debauchery, we are telling God that this is more important to us than loving Him. "We are unable to resist," we may say, but this only proclaims that our God cannot keep us safe from evil. But this was Paul's teaching (and Jesus' teaching) — that He is able to keep us from sin; to keep us faithful to our God, ourselves, our spouses, and our bodies. Jesus has redeemed our bodies. We are totally His.

Learn more about Jesus' patient love for us in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1. According to vs. 14 what happened to Jesus' body? According to this verse, what will happen to our bodies?
2. According to vs. 18-19 what is the uniqueness (and seriousness) of sexual sins?
3. What was the price (vs. 20) of our salvation? (See also the Explanation of the Second Article in Luther's Small Catechism: "not with gold or silver . . .")
4. When did the Holy Spirit first begin living in us (vs. 19)? What implications does the Spirit's presence in us have for the ways we use our body?

### For Family Reflection

5. The text gives an encouragement to Christian parents for sharing age appropriate information and implications on sexual issues. What does it mean for each family member to "flee from sexual immorality" (vs. 18) and to live "sexually pure and decent lives" (6<sup>th</sup> Commandment)?
6. Is everything truly "permissible" (vs. 12)? How do we discern between what is permissible or beneficial?

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

If the members of the Corinthian church joined us in a discussion of their practices, they would no doubt be embarrassed. Their church received warnings from Paul on several fronts—from their practices concerning the Lord’s Supper to their understanding of spiritual gifts. They also seem to have been tempted to listen to false teachers who had wormed their way into the fellowship. As one commentator puts it, the Corinthians “showed themselves to be unusually gullible.” So, in the early verses of today’s lesson, Paul tries to warn them about testing the truth of what they do and what they hear.

Concerning spiritual gifts, the Corinthians’ actions had revealed to Paul that they were missing the crucial point. In verse 7 Paul tells them, and us, something about spiritual gifts. He says, “But to each one is given...for the common good.” We are gifted so that we can contribute to the body of Christ, which surrounds us in the form of our fellow believers.

To be fair to the Corinthians, they tried to use their spiritual gifts. They just misunderstood the “why” of spiritual gifts. We sometimes do that. We often treat God’s gifts as though they are meant only to make our personal lives more comfortable; as if our spiritual gifts, as well as our many other gifts from God, are not meant to equip us for something else. That does make being a Christian easier. If we were more active in trying to use God’s gifts as intended, might we be as prone to error as the Corinthians?

The error for the Corinthians seems to have concerned keeping one’s ego in control while recognizing that God has given each person a special gift to use in the church. As we practice our spiritual gifts, whether those in today’s verses, or those listed elsewhere by Paul (such as serving, teaching, giving, encouraging, leading, showing mercy), we are all servants of one another. However, even today our egos can swell in the excitement of “doing” for God.

It sounds like using our gifts can be rewarding but also frustrating and error-filled. That’s true. Stepping out and living our faith is never easy, but, even to the Corinthians, God *never* said, “Just stop trying, you’ll never get it right.” May all gifts from the Spirit give witness to Christ!

Learn more about serving God in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1. According to vs. 3 and 11 what is the role of the Spirit in the presence and expression of our faith in Jesus?
2. List the spiritual gifts found in vs. 8-10 of this chapter. How does this listing compare to the listing in Romans 12:6-8?
3. Are spiritual gifts important in the church? Are your spiritual gifts important to your church?

### For Family Reflection

4. Review the work of the Spirit described in the Third Article in Luther’s Small Catechism. How has the Spirit been at work in your life?
5. Do we choose our spiritual gifts? (see vs. 11) What spiritual gift has been given to you? Help members of your family (or small group) discover and discuss their gift.
6. As a church (or as individuals in the church) are we sometimes “ignorant” (vs. 1) of the Spirit’s workings and of His gifts? Why?

## The Second Sunday after Epiphany

John 1:29-42

In this passage we see John, a day after Jesus' baptism, at the river with two of his disciples (vs.35). John points out Jesus to them. Afterward he watches them go to follow their new teacher.

How well do most of us do when another person begins to shine more brightly than ourselves? If you have been, or are, a leader in a project at work, how easy is it to see another come in and take over that position of leadership? It's hard to do! But, John understands that his job has not been to be the leader, but to prepare the way for the leader—the Messiah. John has even been asked, “Are you the Messiah?” He replied plainly that he was not. John told Jesus at the baptism, “...I have need to be baptized by You!” He saw his own need for Jesus; He recognized Jesus as the Lord of his entire life.

Perhaps one of the hardest parts of being a Christian is letting Jesus be Lord. It is as though we tell Jesus by our actions that we welcome Him as our Savior, but we like being Number One in our daily lives. We like to keep Jesus “out there” toward eternity somewhere—maybe for when we get really old and can't run our own lives anymore. What a waste! In trying to live on our own power, without Jesus as our Head, we make more mistakes, more missteps, and miss more wonderful opportunities in life than we can imagine. A pastor friend of mine once pointed out how much he loved John the Baptist's words, “He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30) The wonderful thing about allowing ourselves to decrease, as Jesus increases in our lives, is that He continually makes our lives better and better—not with wealth or power, but with peace that passes all understanding and cannot be removed by any one or any thing.

Please consider joining an adult Bible study. It will make your daily walk with Jesus even more blessed! Talk to your pastor about weekly Bible study opportunities.

*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## The Second Sunday after Epiphany

John 1:29-42

1. What name for Jesus do we find in vs. 29 and vs. 36? Why is this name significant? What are the implications of this title?
2. What was the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus (vs. 30-31)? What was John's role in Jesus' ministry? (vs. 34)
3. What was the relationship between Simon Peter and Andrew? What role did Andrew play in Peter's relationship with Jesus?

### For Family Reflection

4. Where in the worship service do we recognize Jesus as the “Lamb of God”? Are there any illustrations of “the Lamb” in your church?
5. What does the name “Messiah” mean (see vs. 41)? What does it mean for us that the Messiah has come?
6. Andrew brings a family member to Jesus. Is there anyone in your family who does not know Jesus? How can you introduce them to Jesus?

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

John 1:43-51

If there is anything that frequently annoys long-time Christians, it is the newly converted zealot who feels like he must tell the whole world about Jesus. It seems like he (or she) is always overly excited about Bible study, church projects, and worship. Even the most routine of church activities excite the guy. Philip sounds like that new Christian. In fact, Philip was a new Christian. His excitement about Jesus demanded that he tell people the good news.

Do you get so busy with living each day that you sometimes forget the excitement of knowing Jesus? The children need attention, the spouse is waiting in the car, that meeting is only twenty minutes away, etc. It's pretty normal to forget about our faith because it has become so much a part of life. At least, it's normal for our sinful nature.

Sometimes being too busy to indulge in the excitement of knowing and sharing Jesus is the less challenging path to take. Philip, for example, found resistance as soon as he began to share his faith. Many modern Christians find the same uncomfortable situation. Nathaniel challenged Philip's witness by suggesting that if there were a messiah, he certainly wouldn't come from Nazareth. That city had never even produced a good prophet, let alone the messiah. Philip did not retreat, but challenged Nathaniel to come and see Jesus for himself.

Are you up to the challenge of getting re-excited about your faith in Jesus Christ? Are you ready to dig into Bible study and prayer again? There is a warning involved—excited people know that the Holy Spirit will give them the courage to be modern day Philips. He will send them out to share the good news about Christ with those who need to “Come and see!”

***Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

John 1:43-51

1. The text begins (vs. 43) “the next day.” Skim the previous verses (vs. 35-42). What had happened the previous day? Who were the first disciples called by Jesus?
2. What was Philip's testimony about Jesus? What was Nathaniel's first response to Philip's introduction?
3. What was Nathaniel's faith response to the all-knowing Jesus?
4. According to vs. 51, what are the blessings of belief?

### For Family Reflection

5. When have you doubted (like Nathaniel) the person and power of Jesus? What changes our heart and our response?
6. Philip introduces his friend to Jesus. Who do you know that you might introduce to Jesus? What words (or deeds) of introduction might you use? With a family member or friend practice introductions to Jesus?

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

John 2:1-11

Sometimes we fall into the trap of believing that Jesus doesn't care about the day-to-day events of our lives. We even teach our children, by our actions, that they shouldn't bother God with anything but major events or needs. Surely God is too busy to bother with financial needs, arguments in the family, sick pets, or vacation plans. Perhaps He would be offended if we talk to Him too much, or ask about too many "little" things. Maybe that attitude is why our prayers tend to become weekly events--events led by the pastor in worship service on Sunday.

In today's passage, John tells us about the first "sign" of Jesus' ministry. As with other signs, like raising a mother's son from the dead, healing the sick, feeding five thousand (that's just the number of men present), or calming stormy seas, this sign of Jesus' divinity began with His compassion for people in everyday situations. There were many signs inspired by His compassion that are not listed in Scripture. Several times the gospel writers wrote simply that He "healed all that were ill" (Matt. 8:16 is one example). Jesus loved people. He laughed; He cried; He shared people's lives; and He cared. He still has that same compassion for you and for me.

When we laugh, when we cry, when we hope or need, Jesus is there with us. He wants to hear our problems and celebrate our victories. All we do is believe in His presence, His love, and His power into our lives.

Jesus once said of Jerusalem, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling" (Matt.23:37). Jesus was speaking of a rebellious nation and people, but perhaps we can glean from these words His great desire to participate fully in our families and in our lives. God wants us to speak to Him and to listen to Him everyday concerning everything.

***Have you invited a friend to attend a regular Bible study with you?***

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday After The Epiphany

John 2:1-11

1. What role did Mary, Jesus' mother, play in the first miracle? How do we see Mary's faith in her Son (vs. 5)?
2. How do we know that the additional wine was provided by Jesus and not brought out of some hidden supply?
3. What's the significance of John's use of the word "sign" (vs. 11)? What other "signs" does John tell about?

### For Family Reflection

4. What do we learn about Jesus as we see Him at weddings and other events? Is Jesus present at our weddings and other special events?
5. What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles (vs. 11)? What was the result of His miracles? Does learning about Jesus' miracles increase our faith in Him?
6. It's the Epiphany season of the church year! What colors do you see on the altar? What's special about this season? What do we learn about Jesus? What do we have to share about Jesus?