

Epiphany 2 1/19/20
Isaiah 49:1-7 A

HE MADE ME A POLISHED ARROW; IN HIS QUIVER HE HID ME AWAY.

William Tell was an unlucky hero, which is probably why the story has had such charm for all these centuries. The legend goes like this: The evil king of Austria was trying to exert control of Switzerland, so he appointed a real scoundrel of a man to rule Switzerland in his place. This scoundrel put an Austrian hat in the town square which the Swiss people were to acknowledge by removing their hats as they passed by -- thus, acknowledging Austria as their ruler.

That was until the day the farmer William Tell entered the picture. He refused to remove his hat in homage to the Austrian hat, and the scoundrel of a bailiff decreed his punishment was that he had to shoot an apple off the head of his young son who accompanied him to town that day. And of course, he did, forever cementing William Tell as the icon of Swiss freedom and character and virtue. We know now the legend of William Tell is just that -- legend, myth, it never really happened, but the story was told throughout the ages, a play was written that became famously popular, and that led Rossini to write his opera, which you all know the overture to because it is the theme of ... the Lone Ranger.

Isaiah writes about another arrow this morning that is not legend, myth, or make believe. It is the polished arrow of Jesus Christ. In this season of Epiphany, we rejoice that God has appeared to us in Jesus of Nazareth. And the words Jesus speaks are like a sharp sword; the words He speaks are like a polished arrow that hit their mark every time.

It is good for us to remember and cherish that, My Friends in Christ, because on this side of heaven we walk by faith, and not by sight. And that

means that the promise of God that comes into your ears does not always agree with what you see with your eyes.

Allow me to illustrate that with the words from the hymn, “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less.” The hymnwriter wrote a most true line, “When every earthly prop gives way (LSB 575:3).” You know all about earthly props giving way, don’t you, Dear Child of God?

That lump, that cough, that pain, finally leads you to the doctor who says the C-Word. You come home one day to discover that your spouse has packed up and moved out and on; and he/she was nice enough to empty your bank account before they left. That job, that wonderful job with the 401K and health insurance, is no more. The decision is made, and now you sit and watch as the doctor pulls the plug on the life support as your loved one lies in the hospital bed.

The Bible tells us that we are “More than conquerors through Him who loved us (Ro 8:37).” Do you always feel like the conqueror that you are in Christ? Jesus promises us, “I am with you always (Mt 28:20).” Do you ever doubt that Jesus is with you? God promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you (He 13:5).” Do you sincerely think He has forsaken you, abandoned you? St. Paul writes, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good (Ro 8:28).” Have you ever found yourself wondering, Do all things really work together for your good?

God speaks, God promises, but you doubt, you despair, you worry, you fear men and earthly things more than God, you feel shame and guilt because you are a sinner. Satan led Eve astray with those simple but profound words, “Did God really say ... (Ge 3:1).” And ever since, we do not believe what God promises, we trust in what we see, what we feel, what we think, more than the sure and certain Word of God.

But, God has Good News for you -- “the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.” You know that, you know it from John 3:16. God sent His only-begotten Son to be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

Just as the ram took Issac’s place in death on Mt. Moriah; just as the sin of all Israel was placed on the scapegoat; just as the Passover Lamb was slain and marked the children of God so death passed over them; the sin of the world was placed on Jesus, He took your place in death; His blood marks you so that death passes over you.

Yes, all your doubt, your despair, your worry, your sin was laid on the Lamb Jesus. He was nailed to the altar of the cross where He suffered and died the death you deserved. Three days later, He rose from the dead. He lives. He lives to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation. And He does it through the polished arrow of His Word.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus said to the two disciples of John, “Come and you will see (Jn 1:39).” Come, Dear Child of God, and see Jesus in the means where He has promised to be found.

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life,” our Savior promises (Jn 6:63). Consider creation: God makes a mud pie and breathes His life into it and it becomes a living thing in the image of God. Lazarus is dead and buried in the grave. What brings Lazarus to life? The same thing that made that mud pie a living man -- the Word of God. God’s Word gives what it says. When The Word says, “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven,” it gives forgiveness.

And God takes that Word and joins it with water so that it becomes a life-giving washing of new birth. Hear the words of Peter, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness

of sins (Ac 2:38).” And God takes that Word and unites it to bread and wine, making it the life-giving body and blood of Jesus, “this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28).” And, where there is forgiveness, there is life and salvation.

The Apostle Paul writes, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Ro 10:17).” God’s Word -- spoken and sung, joined to water, joined to bread and wine -- gives us faith so that we can walk by faith in the sure and certain promises of God’s Word.

Maybe we could think of it this way: Remember our friend William Tell? When the evil bailiff punished him by making him shoot an apple off his son’s head, he just shot it off. When the old accuser tries to punish you and rob you of your joy in Jesus by putting the apple of doubt, despair, worry and fear, guilt and shame, on you, Jesus comes with the polished arrow his Word to just knock it off, never to be remembered again. When death draws near, there is the Polished Arrow of Jesus’ Word to give life, eternal life. And when the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death closes in around us and we cannot even begin to make sense of it with our human reason, there is the Polished Arrow of Jesus’ Word giving us peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.