

Baptism of our Lord 1/8/23
Isaiah 42:1-9 A

“BEHOLD MY SERVANT, WHOM I UPHOLD, MY CHOSEN, IN WHOM MY SOUL DELIGHTS.”

“Let it snow. Let it snow. Let it snow.” Whoever wrote those words, didn’t have to shovel that snow, or he would have never have said such a stupid thing! I’m going to go out on a limb here and guess that you have had enough shoveling snow this winter.

But, I do have a confession to make. Given all of the snow that we have had, your pastor has shoveled very little snow this winter. When the first blizzard came, and the 2nd, and the 3rd, and wherever we are at now -- I can even count that high -- I was under doctor’s orders not to do any snow shoveling. But, the snow got cleared from the driveway and sidewalk because of the kindness and consideration of our neighbors. It was really appreciated when they came over with their snowblowers and blew snow; not to mention the time one came with a blade on his four-wheeler and the time one even came with a bobcat to move snow.

And honestly, I didn’t miss moving snow one bit. Wouldn’t it be nice in every walk of life to have a servant to do those chores for you that you just don’t want to do -- shovel snow, make coffee, make dinner, make sure the laundry is done?

In our Old Testament lesson, God speaks of His Servant,

“Behold My servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations” (v. 1).

God is, of course, talking about His Son, Jesus, who came to us at His birth to be our Servant, to “fulfill all righteousness” for us (Mt 3:15).

It would be nice to have a servant to shovel the snow, do the laundry and cooking. But, let us not make the mistake of becoming fixated on the here and now of today. I don't want to downplay earthly concerns because they are very real, but let us not lose sight of our greatest enemy -- sin. It is easy to do that because we think of sin lightly. You know -- the little white lie; the devil made me do it; and everybody's favorite -- the Sodom and Gomorrah excuse -- everyone else is doing it. We need to think of sin as God does. God takes sin quite seriously -- "the soul who sins shall die," He says (Ez 18:20), and again He says, "the wages of sin is death" (Ro 6:23).

But, God doesn't want you to die. So, God sends His servant to take your place in death. Substitution is the heart of the Gospel. God demands the life-blood of the sinner. But, because God is love, He takes the life-blood of the substitute in the sinner's place.

You will remember God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the only-begotten son that he loved. When they were at the place of the sacrifice, the son had to ask his father, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" To which, his father replied in faith, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Ge 22:8). Abraham, Moses tells us, lifted up his eyes and looked and saw a ram, caught in the thickets. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

And, when the children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he would not let God's children go. So, God sent 10 plagues upon the land, the last the worst, most dreaded of all -- every firstborn in the land of Egypt would die. God instructed the head of each household enslaved in Egypt to take a lamb and kill it. Then, they were to

take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorframe of their homes. That night in Egypt, when the angel of death saw the blood, he “passed over” that home, sparing the life of the firstborn.

And again, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest selected two male goats. He would kill one as a sin offering for the people and bring its blood inside the curtain of the Holy of Holies, sprinkling that blood over the Ark of the Covenant. After that, in the presence of all the people, he would take the other goat, lay both his hands on it, and confess over it all the sins of the people of Israel, thus transferring the sin of the people onto that goat. Then, that goat -- the scapegoat -- was taken into the wilderness, so that the people’s sin was not on them anymore.

Every verse of the Bible points to the cross! As He provided a ram for Abraham, the blood of the lamb for the angel of death in Egypt, and the goats for the Day of Atonement, God has provided a lamb for you. This lamb is His only-begotten Son, who came to us in human flesh at Christmas, to fulfill all righteousness. We sing this Good News today,

“Within the Jordan’s sacred flood
The heav’nly Lamb in meekness stood
The He, of whom, no sin was known,
Might cleanse His people from their own (*LSB* 399:3).

Jesus fulfills all righteousness by taking on our sin and its wages of death. At His baptism, your sin, your death was washed upon the Lamb of God. For that sin, He was betrayed into the hands of sinful men who beat Him, crowned Him with thorns, and nailed Him to the cross where He died as the wages of your sin. Because His blood covered the wood of that cross and He paid for your sin with His life, you are forgiven.

That forgiveness, that life, that salvation that He won for you by His death and resurrection are given to you in the waters of your Baptism. The

Apostle Paul says it this way in our Epistle,

“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Ro 6:4-5).

In your baptism, Christ’s death, His resurrection, His victory over the devil, His eternal life, all became yours. In your baptism, God raises you from the grave of your sin to live in Christ. By virtue of the new birth of our baptism, we live in Christ and we are Christ to the world. This is why Paul writes in our Epistle, “Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”.

Let me say this again, My Friends in Christ, because it is something we must not forget: Substitution is the heart of the Gospel. Christ served you by taking your place. And Christ does His work in you, through His Word and the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood, so that He can do His through you. As the little Christ that you by virtue of your Baptism into Christ, you are Christ’s voice, His hands, His feet in this world. His call is to live as a holy priesthood, to live as those set apart for His own purpose. You will recall that God gave the light of the guiding star to the wise men from the east to lead them to Christ. Now, God gives you to your neighbor -- God shines His Epiphany light through you -- so that He may lead your neighbor to Christ through you. This is why we pray today: "Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You once proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His Name faithful in their calling to be Your children and the inheritors with Him of everlasting life."

Which, of course, brings us to the installation of our officers this

morning. While all the baptized into Christ are called to be faithful as the children of God, you, as office bearers show yourselves, by word and example, to be faithful to Christ. But what is true of our officers is true of each and everyone of us. Our sufficiency is not in ourselves, it is in Christ who lives in us and abides in us, so that in spite of our fears, our doubts, our egos, we may be Christ to our neighbor, and serve them as Christ serves us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.