

**St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-9

***Servant***

The Book of Isaiah, in my opinion, is undoubtedly one of the richest books of the Bible! This amazing book contains prose and poetry as well as history and prophesies. It speaks to the people of Isaiah's day and it continues to speak to us today. Here are some intriguing facts about the book of Isaiah:

- It mirrors the whole Bible.
- Isaiah has 66 chapters: The Bible has 66 books.
- Isaiah has 39 chapters dealing primarily with the history of the Israel while the Bible has 39 Old Testament books dealing primarily with the history of Israel.
- Isaiah has 27 chapters dealing with dealing with the future of the Israelite people including some beautiful prophesy about Christ, the coming Messiah while the New Testament has 27 books dealing with the story of Christ.

Isaiah has been called "The Gospel of the Old Testament" because it is so rich with prophecy pertaining to the Messiah - Jesus Christ. One of the most extraordinary aspects of the Book of Isaiah is what is called the "Servant Songs." There are 5 passages of Scripture in the 2nd part of the Book of Isaiah that beautifully describe the ministry of Christ. Three of the 5 specifically use the word "Servant." This morning's Old Testament reading is the 1st of these Servant Songs.

In this first Servant Song we are introduced to Christ. The Lord says "***Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.***" (Isaiah 42:1) As we heard this morning in the Holy Gospel - when Jesus is baptized by John; God refers to His Son in very similar language when He says, "***You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased***" (Luke 3:22)

In this first Servant Song from Isaiah, God introduces us to Christ, He calls Him "*My Servant*" meaning that Christ will obey His leading and then at the baptism of Christ, God again speaks at the very beginning of Christ's public ministry when Jesus begins to fulfill these words from Isaiah 42. You see Jesus of Nazareth is the One who will quietly work to fulfill God's plan of salvation for all of humanity. He won't be arrogant or proud, but instead He will humbly fill the role of a Servant to God's people. The Gospel of Matthew quotes this passage of Isaiah as being fulfilled when Christ went around healing those who were hurting and sick and then asked them not to tell Who He was. "*This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles will hope."*" (Matthew 12:17-21)

In Isaiah 42:3 we are presented with a beautiful picture of the work and ministry of Christ: "*a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.*" These people were quite familiar with reeds near the Sea of Galilee, or along the Jordan River.

Reeds have hollow stems and are quite fragile. In fact, many times when you see reeds by the waterside many of them are knocked over. They can be knocked over by the wind, or waves, or even by animals that come to the water's edge to drink. People who come to the water to fish, or use a boat can break reeds down. Once a reed is broken, it can't be fixed. Reeds are like rose petals. You can't put them back! Isaiah isn't talking about reeds, but instead he is talking about people. Isaiah is telling us that people can become bruised, hurt and knocked over. In our world, there are many hurting people who can be knocked over by just living; they can be knocked over by other people; they can be knocked over by

disease and sickness; they can be knocked over by the thoughtlessness and carelessness of other people. There are many people that are bruised, broken and hurting. They are all around us, living right next door to us, on line at Topp's or Wegman's, even at the Bill's or Sabre's games. They are even here in this service this morning.

In all three of our Scripture lessons this morning: Isaiah, Acts and Luke, we clearly see that Jesus came to have an impact: not on reeds but on people. *"He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*(Acts 10:38) He did not come to break a person who was also broken. Jesus did not come to knock down a person who was already bent low with the difficulties of life. Jesus did not come to hurt you! **Unlike a reed - which is unable to be fixed after we are broken Jesus is able to bind up our broken lives. Jesus is able to give us new strength. He is able to apply a healing salve to our damaged lives.**

He did not come loud and obnoxious; He came softly and gently to mend the broken reeds of the world.

- Blind Bartimaeus was a bruised reed. The leper was a bruised reed touched by Jesus. He was diseased, shunned by everyone, but Jesus came and touched him and his life was forever changed!!
- The man on the mat was a bruised reed. He was lowered by his friends through the roof in hopes of being healed. He was healed by Jesus and forgiven of his sins, told to *"stand up, take your mat and go to your home"* (Mark 2:11) and his life was forever changed!!
- The demon-possessed man was a bruised reed touched by Jesus. He was living among the tombstones, naked, and tormented. But Jesus came and touched him and his life was forever changed!!
- The woman caught in adultery was a bruised reed touched by Jesus. She was about to be cast away by society and stoned for her sin and they would have been justified in their stoning according to the law. But Jesus told her *"go your way, and from now on do not sin again"* (John 8:11), He touched her and her life was forever changed!!
- The woman with the flow of blood was a bruised reed. She was in pain, weak, weary, and seen as unclean. She thought she would touch Jesus but instead, Jesus touched her in a way that she never dared hope and her life was forever changed!!
- Jesus is the answer for all of the bruised reeds in our world. He is the answer for those who are bruised, broken, hurting. Knowing Jesus changes lives.

We also read in the words from Isaiah that a smoldering wick will not be extinguished. Some translations refer to "a smoking flax" – flax was used as a wick for an oil lamp.

Please try to remember the week that began with the surprise snowfall of October 12, 2006. Remember the power outages? Many lived by the light of a candle or oil lamp – it was the only light they had. Well, that was what life was like in the time of Jesus. As the afternoon turned to evening and it started to get dark, they would light the oil lamps. Imagine that during the course of the evening the lamps begin to go out, one by one, all except this one lamp. It begins to flicker. It is running low of oil. The light begins to grow dim. Before it goes out it starts to smolder and it starts to give off smoke and a strong odor. At that point most people, would probably get up, put out the light and go to bed. Just like the reeds - the smoking flax represents people too.

These are people who started out well in spiritual things, with their lives burning brightly. At one time, they had a good relationship with the Lord. At one time, they were on fire for God. But during the course of the months or years the oil begins to go out, the light begins to flicker, and their relationship with the Lord, that at one time had been so good now had become faint and flickering. There is some

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spiritual life left but not much; it is just about to go out.

Isaiah says that's when Jesus comes He is not going to just put out the light and go to bed...

It is not His desire to destroy what little faith is left in us. It is His desire to trim the wick to add oil to the lamp, to fan the flame; not to quench the light but to bring it back to greater strength than ever before.

The nature of Jesus is gentleness...tenderness...and kindness.

There are different ways that our relationship with the Lord may begin to flicker:

- Maybe sin creeps into our lives
- Maybe pride or selfishness creeps in
- Maybe people begin to hang around with the wrong crowd
- Maybe it is neglect of spiritual duties like prayer; Bible Study and Church attendance.

But for whatever reason - our spiritual life begins to flutter.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus hasn't come to put out the flickering flame of your life. Jesus wants to fan the flame. He wants to give us more oil in the form of His Holy Spirit. He wants the light to come back burning brighter than ever! Jesus wants to bring revival for our soul.

In Paris, France, there is a famous memorial to the French soldiers who died in the war. I am sure you have seen pictures of it. It is called the Arc De Triomphe. Every day, they perform a ritual that is called "replenishing the eternal flame." The ritual involves a French Military Officer walking up to the flickering flame. He takes his sword and touches a button on the base of the memorial, which replenishes the oil and the flame shoots up, burning brightly once more.

That's what Jesus wants to do for you! He wants to replenish you. He doesn't want to put the fire out, but instead He wants to fire you up!! Jesus wants to give you a fresh infusion of His Holy Spirit. Jesus wants to fan the flame of revival in your heart and in our church!!

Maybe you are here this morning and you are a broken reed - you are bruised by the cares of life. You are broken down and hurting. Jesus does not intend to knock you down further. He wants to mend your wounds to bind you and heal you. He wants to smother you in His love and let you rest in His peace.

Maybe you are here this morning and at one time, you were on fire for the Lord but now your relationship is waning and growing dim. In fact you might feel like it is on the verge of going out. Jesus is here and He just wants to fan your flame. He wants to bring back the light. He wants to revive your spirit! And He will do it today...if you will let Him.

Almighty God sent His Son, to act as His willing Servant to bring light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes to Him, to free people from the prisons that they have made for themselves; prisons of despair, of loneliness, of pain, or of guilt and shame. Jesus will not force Himself on anyone. Jesus desires those who hear Him to come to Him and be changed. Jesus said "*anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.*" (John 6:37-38) He also said "*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28) Each person who Jesus touches and restores, in turn longs to serve Him.

The marvel of the Gospel is that when we trust in Jesus Christ for healing and salvation, His perfect obedience becomes ours. As our representative, His righteousness satisfies the requirements of the Law. His death on the cross pays the penalty of our failures, our sins, and purchases our forgiveness. In His perfect obedience, even unto death, Jesus establishes His right to share with all His people not only His righteous status as the Son of God but also His endowment with the Holy Spirit. God the Father said

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*“I have put my Spirit upon him.”* Jesus in turn pours out that same Holy Spirit on His church, that we might be empowered to be His servants in the world. And God delights in His church – God delights in you – as we are united by faith to His servant in whom His soul delights.

Have you stopped to think that God delights in you as you belong to his servant, Jesus Christ? He delights in you as a servant of His servant.