



## First Sunday After Epiphany

January 8, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

### Theme: Jesus Is the Real Contender!

#### Sermon Text: Isaiah 42:1-7

<sup>1</sup>42 “Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him,  
and he will bring justice to the nations.

<sup>2</sup>He will not shout or cry out,  
or raise his voice in the streets.

<sup>3</sup>A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

<sup>4</sup> he will not falter or be discouraged  
till he establishes justice on earth.  
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

<sup>5</sup>This is what God the LORD says—  
the Creator of the heavens, who stretches them out,  
who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it,  
who gives breath to its people,  
and life to those who walk on it:

<sup>6</sup>“I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.

I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,

<sup>7</sup>to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.



Keith Allen Barton made a lot of promises according to NBC news in San Diego. He claimed he could cure things like cancer and HIV with a new alternative therapy. People trusted Dr. Barton, and many patients put their lives in his hands. That was a grave mistake. You see, “Dr.” Barton wasn’t a real doctor. He had no medical training. His treatments didn’t cure anyone. Barton was a pretender who bilked his patients out of tens of thousands of dollars. In one case, a nine-year-old girl died because she didn’t get the real treatment she needed. Barton preyed on those who were desperate for a cure; who needed something hopeful to hang on to. In the end, those who went to him had their hopes dashed to pieces when he failed to deliver on his promises (<http://nbcсандiego.com/news/local/Phony-Doctor-Keith-Barton-Claimed-He-Could-Cure-HIV-Cancer-DA-186240712.html>).

Our text from Isaiah 42 tells a far different story. In Ch. 41 of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Lord unmasked all the false gods—mere “pretenders” who could only snuff out the hope of His people Israel. Now He introduces the real Contender: His chosen Servant who would fight for us and for our salvation and deliver exactly what He promised to those who need real hope and healing. That Servant is . . .

## **Jesus, the Real Contender!**

Isaiah’s contemporaries had a veritable smorgasbord of choices when it came to people and things to put their hope in. They *hoped* that their king could keep them safe and make them prosperous by his military might or political maneuvering. They *hoped* that they could somehow make their own way in life. They *hoped* that Isaiah’s dire predictions were just the mindless ramblings of a religious fanatic. But worst of all, was the vain *hope* they put in the Babylonian false god, Marduk, and Canaanite deities, Baal and Asherah—each one a “pretender” to God’s throne.

People have lots of options today, too, when it comes to what they think will bring them meaning and security. Reed Lessing, a Lutheran Church Missouri Synod seminary professor, stated in a recent presentation, “An idol is anyone or anything we believe will give us what only God can give. An idol is whatever we look at and say, ‘If I can get that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure’” (Reed

Lansing, Martin Luther and Idolatry: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sex, Money and Power [St. Louis: Unpublished PowerPoint presentation], 10. Used by permission.) .

Or, put negatively, an idol is something we feel we can’t live without. For some, it’s money, self-indulgence, sexual pleasure, power or success. For others, it’s drugs or alcohol, gambling or globetrotting, fashion or food. Many put their hope and trust in government programs, stock portfolios, scratch tickets or their net worth, while others look to their philanthropy or volunteer work to give them meaning and purpose. But if a person views even the noblest endeavor as a way to get into God’s good graces, they’d be sadly mistaken.

When it comes to our relationship with God, there’s a much greater risk involved than just making the wrong choice. There’s the real danger that the choice one makes will destroy them and leave them with nothing but eternal regret and despair. That’s why God shouts an

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emphatic, “No!” to every false hope we might cling to. Through Isaiah, He points to the coming Messiah and cries: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”

Jesus is God’s choice for hope and salvation. He left heaven’s glories behind and took on our flesh and blood; He fought tooth and nail with our archenemy, the devil, and defeated him once and for all at His empty tomb! He once told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (John 4:34). And Jesus did complete His saving mission on Calvary’s cross, crying out victoriously from that sacred altar: “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Now He sends His Spirit to us, in Word and Sacrament, to bolster our trust in Him, increase our love for others and strengthen our hope of heaven.

All three Persons of the Godhead were present at Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River: God the Son stood knee-deep in the muddy waters and submitted to John’s baptism in order to “fulfill all righteousness.” And we read in our Gospel lesson: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven”—the voice of God the Father—“said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:15-17). Jesus was baptized as our Substitute, already bearing our sins in His body in the waters of the Jordan, washing us clean and joining us by faith to His death and resurrection in that sacred act, so that we might “die to sin” and “live a new life” (Rom. 6) to His glory and to the good of others. Just as the entire Godhead participated in Jesus’ baptism, so the Triune God is actively involved at every baptism in which water is applied “in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.”

At His baptism, the Father designated Jesus as the “Servant” of our text by His verbal endorsement and by anointing Him with His “Spirit” as He’d predicted. He set Jesus apart as the real Contender who would vanquish every other pretender to the throne of heaven and to the throne in our hearts. Isaiah said God’s “Servant . . . will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.” Since He was chosen by God the Father and upheld by God’s Spirit, God’s “Servant” carried out His task in the quiet confidence that He was doing God’s will. Jesus served as “a covenant” or pledge of salvation “for the people” of God—the Israelites—as well as “a light” of eternal hope “for the Gentiles.” He came “to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness,” imprisoned by the guilt and shame of their sins and failures and by their life-long fear of death. When this true “Servant” of the Lord was arrested and stood before Pilate, facing many false accusations, He had no need to defend Himself. Since He was anointed by the Spirit, He didn’t need to depend on persuasive arguments or slick promotional campaigns to convince people that He was able to bring God’s “justice” to the world. He didn’t *sell* Himself; He *gave* Himself.

Jesus is the only One who can provide the living hope and blessed assurance we so desperately need when it comes to our relationship with God. His love isn’t predicated upon our love for Him. It’s an *unconditional* love. When we were baptized into Christ, God the

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Holy Spirit finalized our adoption into God's family—a process that began even before the earth's foundations were laid. When we go through difficult times that test our faith to its very core, God assures us that He will not abandon us. When our faith is fragile, God vows to not shatter us. At such times, Isaiah's Spirit-breathed words encourage us, for He says of Jesus, A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

Instead, He upholds us by His Spirit and strengthens us through His Word. If you're that person whose conscience is wounded and spirit is weak, He won't write you off as someone who's beyond hope or not worth the effort. He won't tell you that you need to try harder to escape your problem, or pray more fervently or be more sincere in your faith like the "pretenders" say. God's Contender—His Servant Jesus—comes to you to bind you up with His healing balm of His grace.

Long ago in the days of Isaiah, God promised to send a Servant who would set the prisoners free. That Servant came for you and for me and for every human being. Isaiah was sent with the prophecy revealing the Servant of the Lord. It was, and it remains, a warning to those who would be tempted to find their hope in the world. It was, and still is, a caution for those whose misplaced trust would leave them with nothing but brokenness and never-ending suffering in hell's prison cell. It was, and it continues to be, a call to turn away from the false gods of this fallen world—to repent—and live by faith in God's long-promised Deliverer. We know that God delivered on that promise! Yes, the Promised One has come! He was made manifest at His baptism in the River Jordan and at your baptism into Him. Praise God that in that "washing with water thru [His] word" (Eph. 5:26), His Contender delivered you from sin's guilt and power and from eternal death in hell!

Say thanks to God by living in a way that honors Him. Do you want a tranquil life? Then keep His commandments. Do you want to feel fulfilled? Then take the time make the effort and invest the energy to help someone in need. Do you want some relief from your stress? Then pray to God, who alone works all thing out for your eternal good. Do you want purpose and meaning? Then remember that you are a child of the one true God! So "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God" as the prophet Micah urged (6:8). Hope in Jesus, God's real Contender! Amen.