

Sermon - January 8, 2017 - Epiphany 1: The Baptism of Our Lord,

## The Real God

Isaiah 42:1-9



Dear Friends in Christ,

Have ever been duped by appearances? Only to realize later one that you were putting your life at risk. Be it a product you bought or the professional services you were seeking.

Back in 2014, the Windsor Star, had a piece of news entitled: “His delivery was very smooth’ Fake doctor duped victims in this area for two years”

It is about Darko Jovanovich who posed as a doctor. “To healthy people, he’d give grave diagnoses. To the ailing, he’d offer hope of a miraculous cure.” The newspaper adds.

Jovanovich “would dole out medical advice with all the aplomb of a seasoned, compassionate professional. There was only one problem: Jovanovich wasn’t a doctor. He was a fraudster who had so cleverly covered his tracks that even after his conviction for crimes committed over two years in the Windsor area, his past remains a mystery.”

He forged documents and performed bogus medical exams on the unwitting victims he had beguiled. He claimed he was a pediatric neurosurgeon with privileges at Detroit’s Henry Ford Hospital. “Everything he did looked legitimate.” A witness said.<sup>1</sup>

After offering false hope or and deceiving several people, and stealing their money, fortunately he was caught and is now in prison. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the real thing when fakes are sweet talkers.

It can happen to us, and certainly it happens with faith as well. There are many who present a fake knowledge and understanding of God. It can even be entire religions systems that present a false, corrupted and fake understanding of God.

Fortunately for us our Old Testament reading from Isaiah 42 shows a much different story, it introduces to us the real God. It does so after the previous chapter, chapter 41 exposes the “pretenders,” that have come in the shape of false gods who could do nothing but snuff out all hope. But here in chapter 42 we hear of God’s chosen Servant who will fight for us and deliver exactly what is promised to those who need real hope. That Servant is Jesus! Jesus is the real God, the real Contender.

The bad thing we face is that we have lots of choices when it comes to faith; we can chose to believe or disbelief, we can chose to take something and call it hope, or we can chose to believe somebody’s sweet talk and call it enlightenment or revelation, or even anointed by the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://windsorstar.com/uncategorized/his-delivery-was-very-smooth-fake-doctor-duped-victims-in-this-area-for-two-years-with-videos>

It is not different from Isaiah's day; people also had lots of options to choose from when it came to looking for hope. There was the hope that their king could help them stay safe and prosperous through military might or political maneuvering. There was the hope that they could somehow make their own way through life. Then there was the hope that Isaiah's prophetic prediction of doom, defeat, and downfall was just wrong. And, of course, there was the hope that was offered to the followers of the false gods worshiped in Babylon, such as Marduk, or the Canaanite gods, Baal or Asherah. All fakes.

Today we don't have Marduk, or Baal, or Asherah as it was then, but the choices are there. And people will always choose what they think will bring meaning and security to their lives. The problem is that those choices will become idols. And yes, will resemble marduk, Baal or Asherah.

Pastor Reed Lessing says that "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' "<sup>2</sup>

Or, to put it negatively, an idol is something we feel we cannot live without. For example, answer yourself this question, which one would you say you couldn't live without this week: church or your paycheck? Prayer or Facebook? A time with God or a time of socializing, not fellowshiping in Christ, but socializing with others? What will bring you more satisfaction?

So, people will choose money, self-indulgence, sexual pleasure, power, and success. They will look to princes and rulers to keep them safe and prosperous, have you seen peoples comments on facebook regarding Trudeau, Trump?

They will look to their own good works or to the acclaim of others to give them meaning, people look up to philosophical thoughts here or there, and think this is what should be.

Have you seen how people, and even Christians take pride in their socializing, and celebrations...? But seldom take pride in their faith, and what Christ really means to us.

But, friends, all these things are all pretenders, maybe not fake, but they certainly pretend to give us hope and a meaning in life. Now, the greater the danger is that those choices will destroy a person and leave that person with nothing but eternal regret and despair.

That's why God the Father, says to each one of us who's clinging to false hopes, "No! Here is my Servant." Here is God's choice for hope and salvation, the one who will contend for us. He is the one who will really give you hope and life worth living, and life eternal.

But, soon enough we will see this Servant, being ridiculed first, rejected by man and because of our "bad choices" being killed (Is 53:3; Lk 23:35).

Now, it is important to know that, so that when it does happen, we will not falter in our faith. And so that when those who trust him, Christian, when you are reviled by

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<sup>2</sup> (Reed Lessing, Martin Luther and Idolatry: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sex, Money and Power [St. Louis: Unpublished PowerPoint presentation], 10. Used by permission.)

the world, when your faith is tested or mocked, the Servant, God's servant will be able to sustain you, and you will be enabled to trust him.

Therefore God says "Behold, my servant . . . in whom my soul delights" (v 1). He was called in "righteousness" (v 6). In Him, the reality of God is manifested and through him you find the source of God's grace for all people as one who is truly righteous.

And finally, this Chosen One of God will be set apart from the fakes and pretenders by a special anointing of the Holy Spirit, which will not only empower him for his task, but also indicate to all, that he is the one set apart by God. "I have put my Spirit upon him" (v 1) God the Father says. No others will receive this anointing, the Spirit of God descending upon him in bodily form like a dove. No others will be guaranteed to do what he does and bring what he will bring for those who desperately need hope.

That's what makes the Servant of the Lord different from the pretenders. First, he "will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street" (v 2). Because he is chosen by God and upheld by him, he carries out his task in the quiet confidence that he is doing God's will (Is 53:7). When this true Servant of the Lord was arrested and stood before Pilate facing many false accusations, he had no need to defend himself. So he remained silent. Because he is anointed by the Spirit, he does not need to depend on persuasive arguments or slick promotional campaigns to convince people he is able to bring God's justice to the world. He doesn't sell himself. He gives himself.

The Servant of the Lord is also different from all the fake and pretenders because he will show compassion on those weak and wavering—near the breaking point—or whose faith is flickering (v 3).

If you're that one whose conscience is wounded and spirit is weak, he will not write you off as someone beyond hope or not worth the effort. He won't tell you, you need to try harder to escape your problem, or pray harder, or be more sincere in faith. He is so different from the pretenders. He'll come to you and bind you up with his healing Word of forgiveness.

This Servant of the Lord is also unique, is the real One, he shines above the pretenders. This Servant of the Lord shines above them because he is sent to set the prisoner free from the dungeon of darkness and sin (v 7). While all the false gods only imprison, this Servant of the Lord sets free and brings light and life.

Hear it in the words of one who's lived it in his own life, who needed the real One. Tyler is a young man who today sits in prison, anxiously waiting the day of his release. Through the ministry of the local pastor, the Holy Spirit called him to repentance and faith.

"Every day waking up in prison is a nightmare." He says "Not that it's particularly scary or a place I fear. It's the aspect of having no options. I am told by those in authority what to do and when to do it. When it's time to eat, they tell me. I have no choice when or what to eat. Rec time is the same way: outside my control. It's all outside my control."

Spiritual imprisonment to sin is, in many ways, the same. When you're spiritually imprisoned to sin, your flesh is calling all the shots. You are not in control.

Your sin is in control, and you are a slave to it; whether it's drugs, stealing, or sexual immorality, or all of the above.

I have found time and time again that, when left to my own devices, I am always snared by sin. I have found that the only way out of this prison is Jesus Christ. He gives me the strength to resist the paths of sin, which lead only to death. How is that possible? Because Christ died for the sins of the world and rose again on the third day, triumphing over sin and death so that I can be set free from my bondage.

Long ago, in the days of Isaiah, God designated his Servant to set the prisoner free. The Servant delivered on that promise for Tyler, who was baptized behind prison bars but given the ultimate freedom. He knows what justice is, sentenced for his offenses. But he knows what God's justice is, having been made right with God in Jesus and declared completely forgiven and renewed in Christ. That Servant came not only for Tyler; he came for you as well.

Isaiah was sent with the prophecy revealing the Servant of the Lord. It was a message for those who would be tempted to find their own hope in this world. It was a message for those whose misplaced trust was about to leave them with nothing but brokenness and death. It was a call to turn away from the false gods and prophets and live. We know that this one was promised and now has come, manifest at the waters of the Jordan River. God has not only promised; he has delivered. And in him, he has delivered you.

Amen.