

# “Opening Heaven”

Isaiah 42:1-9 and Matthew 3:13-17

Baptism of the Lord, Year A

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The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

## Isaiah 42:1-9

Here is 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. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

## Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Prayer.

How is it that you are known?  
Each of us are known by our actions  
Or our potential to act.  
We are known by our reputation;  
By what we have done  
Or what we could have done.  
We are known as different things

To different people.  
To my fourth grade teacher,  
I was known as the kid  
Who put tacks on her chair  
And recklessly broke the school’s movie  
projector.  
To the smart-alec catcher on the other Farm  
League baseball team,  
The playground bully

Who wielded violence and threats of violence  
I was known as the kid who wouldn't take it anymore;  
I was known as the kid who snapped and beat the snot out of him.  
To another kid  
I was a punching bag  
Simply because I walked my dog in front of his house.  
To my theology professors  
I was a fly in their ointment.  
I asked the zingers that brought the class  
To an abrupt 12 car collision like halt.  
"Just why do we go to church on Sunday?"  
"Why didn't God just snap his fingers and make it so?"  
"If everything God created is good, just how do you explain evil?"  
To an economist,  
I am a consumer.  
To a politician,  
I am a voter.  
To police officer,  
I am a civilian.  
To a librarian,  
I am a borrower.  
To my church,  
I am a pastor, prophet, or friend.  
To my family,  
I am a husband, father, brother, and son.

How is it that you are known?

The Prophet Isaiah  
(really 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah, who was the prophet in exile)  
was known as the hopeful one.  
Though all were grumbling prisoners  
Held against their will  
Isaiah was the one  
- the only one-  
who could look  
Forward to restoration  
With some clarity.

Isaiah was known as God's mouthpiece  
Because Salvation was coming  
At the hand of God's servant.  
Salvation was coming  
At the hand of humanity's Savior,  
And his signature  
Will be known as justice.

He will be known for his self-control:  
Not crying out, screaming or shouting.  
He will not break or quench  
He will be known by what  
Is built and who he has touched.  
He will be known as  
The one who stands his ground  
And doesn't back down  
In the face of  
That which is wrong with the world.  
To some he will be known as a light,  
To others he will be as judge and jury.  
To some,  
He will be known as justice,  
To others,  
He will be Righteousness,  
To all,  
He will be the source of  
All things new that springs forth  
That gives life unto the land.

How is it that you are known?

We know,  
Or we think we know,  
That Jesus was the sinless one  
Who sought out John  
To be baptized by his hands.  
We can't help but sympathize with John's protests:  
"Me baptize you?  
You should baptize me!"  
What does Jesus need  
To repent from?  
To be cleansed from?

But Jesus has bigger fish to fry.

He remakes the ancient exercise of baptism  
And creates something new.  
We believe Jesus is fully human and fully  
divine.  
He joins us in his humanity  
When he submits himself to baptism,  
No longer an act focused on sin,  
Now, it is a common righteousness that is  
shared,  
A mutual act of initiation and acceptance.  
Jesus is now revealed.  
An epiphany is now made.  
We share this common bond  
His common humanity  
We are made One  
In the Body of Christ  
When we join him in our baptismal waters.

But being washed clean is only a temporary  
solution.  
Being cleansed can only bring us so far.  
Being washed by the blood of the Lamb  
Will only solve yesterday's transgressions.  
But what about tomorrow?

Jesus is also known as the Son of God.  
He is revealed by the Spirit's movement.  
He is revealed by the voice of God.  
In the Hebrew Scripture,  
this voice is called the "daughter of the  
voice" (bat qol),  
that is, the "echo" of  
something God has spoken.<sup>1</sup>  
As the Son of God  
He is the one who has stretched us out  
across the earth.  
He is the one who has given us life and  
health and breath.  
He is the one who has anointed us with his  
Spirit.  
He is the one who has taken us by the hand.

He is the one who has kept us.  
The Spirit of God  
Descends like a dove  
And alights upon him,  
Revealing to all  
the salvation that is our God.  
Because we are joined to his body  
Though our common baptism  
We are joined with our God  
Through his eternal salvation.

How is it that you are known?

Wouldn't it be nice if we  
Wore our baptism on our sleeve?  
If we were known first  
As "oh, yea, he is that baptized guy,"  
Or "I know her, she is that baptized gal."  
Wouldn't it be wonderful if the world  
Came to know God  
Through our common baptism  
With Jesus Christ our Lord?  
"She is a disciple of Jesus," or  
"He is filled with the Holy Spirit," or  
"They are trying to make a difference,  
on behalf of the Church,  
that the world might be changed."  
Kind of like  
in an organized crimes sense of the word;  
"To know me is to know my people.  
To know my people is to know me."  
Except there is no organization  
Other than discipleship.  
There is no crime  
Other than working towards  
The completion of God's kingdom.

How is it that you are known?  
Remember your baptism,  
And be thankful.  
Amen.

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[http://liturgy.slu.edu/BaptismLordA011308/theword\\_cultural.html](http://liturgy.slu.edu/BaptismLordA011308/theword_cultural.html)