

January 22, 2023 **The Spirit-Empowered Servant** *Isaiah 42:1-9*

THE EMPOWERED LIFE... Each week we're focusing upon how God calls upon us to lead Faithful and powerful lives—individually and corporately—In service to God.

We've explored already the empowered leadership of Paul through change and just last week about the power of persistent advocacy From the gentile Canaanite woman. Today we continue our series turning now to the Old Testament, and reading from the Prophet Isaiah.

Let us hear the Prophets' first Servant Song—a powerful Word from God from Isaiah 42:1-9 (NRSVUE)

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 out 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.

This is the Word of God for the people of God...

This morning I'd like to pause for just a moment to talk about the meaning of the word "spirit," because Isaiah uses it twice in today's reading.

God says in v 1—I have put my spirit upon my chosen servant...

Then God says in v 5—I give spirit to those who walk upon the earth...

The original Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” were used to convey concepts as diverse as a breath, a breeze and a powerful gale. But it also meant an angel, a demon, the heart and soul of a human being, and of course—the Divine presence of God.

That is a remarkable range of meanings for one Hebrew word—*ruach*; and one Greek word—*pneuma*. Translation then is key...AND understanding the context and structure of how the word is used...makes all the difference.

Now if I were to ask you to list 10 references to God’s Spirit in the OT, some might have some trouble with that. But in the OT alone, the Hebrew word for spirit—*ruach*—occurs almost 400 times!

As Christians, we far too often think of the HS as an exclusively NT concept. Remember Jesus said to Nicodemus, “*The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or from where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” (Jn 3:8)

Acts 2 recounts Pentecost as disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit with the rush of a mighty wind & tongues of fire resting upon all.

Peter preaches later in Acts 2:38 to the first converts:

“Repent & be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; & you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This is a cornerstone passage for our Christian faith. But there are so many important passages about the Spirit, and many come from the OT, our Hebrew Scriptures.

Ezekiel 37:1 “*The hand of the Lord came upon me & brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, & set me down in the midst of the valley of dry bones.*”

Dt 34:9 tells us that Joshua the Son of Nun was filled with the Spirit of wisdom to lead God’s people after the death of Moses.

And from Judges 6:34, “*God’s Spirit came upon Gideon.*” And in 11:29, “*God’s Spirit came upon Jephthah.*” And upon all the other judges.

Job proclaimed, “*The Spirit of God made me what I am, the breath of God Almighty gave me life.*” (Job 33:4)

And of course today’s powerful passage from Isaiah 42:1, the beginning of his Servant Songs where God proclaims through the Prophet, *Behold! My servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights! I have put my Spirit upon him!*” Today’s passage is part of Isaiah’s prophetic dream that spans ch 40-55, most probably written during the Babylonian Exile (500 BC)



Remember context is important! Israel was weary to the bone and wracked with hopelessness. Their temple & cities destroyed, leaders & people marched to distant lands. An entire people displaced as refugees and captives. Which makes this prophetic Word of dazzling hope-filled poetry truly unexpected.

My chosen, spirit-empowered servant will bring forth justice to the nations. Hear God's Words to a bone-weary people: He will not cry out, he will not break, he will bring justice, He will not grow faint!

The Prophet refers to a servant—whom Christians would later identify with Jesus. The servant is depicted vividly, including his powerful experience of the Spirit. Isaiah describes God's relationship to the servant with tenderness and affection. God puts, or places, the Spirit upon the servant. This action is tender to the core: the one upon whom God places God's own spirit is the one whom God also upholds, chooses, and delights in.

That's unconditional support. Unqualified choice. Only in the context of this profound RELATIONSHIP...does God place the Spirit upon the servant. A time when an entire people had lost countless relationships with family, Friends, their home, their church, their land, their work...Is it any wonder that This first Servant Song speaks so intimately and powerfully of relationship with God?

You know, even as I say this, I can't help but think on my marriage.

~For 39 years, Rich and I have been, as we said in our vows, "by each other's side in prayer and in service."

~For 39 years, he alone has been my choice for a life's love.

~For 39 years, he has been my delight, the one I uphold.

~And because of this, Rich shares my spirit and I his; and he is my life-breath.

Now, please hear me...I don't want to reduce God's relationship with the servant to an illustration of human marriage or partnership. Yet we can learn something essential about the Spirit from the illustration I think.

If we want to be inspired, empowered to live life fully, if we yearn to have God's Spirit upon us, then we need to hunker down for the long haul by maintaining the relationship we have with God and God with us. I think we all know that a marriage, indeed any partnership, requires routine daily care and maintenance.

*The daily "I love you's" by word and action.

- *The openness to change and growth with each other.
- *The intentional times together for laughing and simply being.
- *The gift of respect.
- *The dance of compromise.

Oh a marriage & true partnership requires routine daily care & attention...to maintain a healthy, balanced, joyous life together for the long haul. Well I believe the same is true for having a spirit-empowered relationship with the Lord. And the servant from Isaiah's dream describes the sort of routine care & attention that leads to such a Spirit-filled life.

Listen to what the servant says a few chapters later in Isaiah (50:4-5)

“The Lord has given me the tongue of a learner,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.
Morning by morning God wakens—wakens my ear...
to listen as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.”

The servant in this awesome little autobiographical snippet, offers a peek into the mechanics of inspiration—how we exactly live an empowered life with the “Spirit of God upon us.” The servant offers us a compact, 3-step model of routine care & maintenance to keep us flowing in the spirit.

FIRST we note that God arouses the servant morning by morning.

-Not once a week or twice a year on special holidays.

-Not just with other people around.

-Not only in a worship setting.

But every day!

If we are earnest about how to live with the Spirit of the Lord upon us, then we should be interested in the words “morning by morning.” At the beginning of every day, the servant listens. In fact, the words, “God wakens—wakens my ear,” mean just what they say: God wakes the servant up, roused from sleep. The servant is routinely awakened by the Spirit.

SECOND, the servant listens with the ear of a disciple, of an eager learner, to receive God's teaching, God's purposes, God's will. Once up, the servant doesn't start talking, doesn't chatter. The servant listens...committed to hearing the Spirit's instruction daily. This is why prayer, devotions, journaling, silence and worship are all spiritual disciplines.

Its why we' came today or why we go to First Methodist's FB page or YouTube channel each week—because through our music, prayers, scripture and sermon—each can help us as God's servants to LISTEN! Daily we must find ways to listen & open ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

Finally, as with any successful program of training, the servant has a goal, vs. 4 gives a very specific goal—to sustain the weary with a word.

- The servant does not listen to gain insight to dazzle others by an inspired sermon.
- The servant doesn't listen to impress others with spiritual insight.
- The servant does not listen for fiery indictments of the sins of the world.
- The servant listens rather, to learn how to sustain the weary with a word.

A word of Encouragement. A word of Hope. A word of Possibility. Servants called to sustain the weary with a WORD.

*Friends, is it any wonder we see Jesus as the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah's servant? "And the Word was with God, & the Word was God...& the Word became flesh." (John 1) But again, let's not forget the context in which these words were written, God's people were exhausted by years in exile, depleted by captivity in Babylon.

His hearers were worn out, and they needed to become acquainted again with, as the Prophet declared in Ch 40—"the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth who does not grow weary or faint, whose understanding is unsearchable, who gives power to the weary & strengthens the powerless. God's people are spent, so the spirit-empowered servant Is called to awaken routinely, listen routinely, to be a source of regular daily encouragement.

What a powerful model for a Spirit-empowered life: **Awaken – Listen – Encourage.**

The Prophet Isaiah provides us a great model for the Spirit-filled life:

*First, meet God every morning. Commit yourself to routine awakening.

*Second, Listen—don't talk. Practice routine listening.

*Third, Train for the goal of sustaining the weary with a word. Devote yourself to routine encouragement.

And isn't this just what we talked about last November, Discovering what it means to unleash our God-given spiritual gifts? The Prophet is reminding us today of the importance of claiming and unleashing these gifts through:

The Love Gifts of mercy and compassion...

The Power Gifts of listening, prayer, knowledge and wisdom...and

The Word Gift of encouragement.

All help a disciple and servant of Christ, grow and develop a healthy spiritual life and relationship with God, each other, and the communities we are a part of. Over and over again, throughout the Old and New Testaments—we have seen witness to the fact that the Holy Spirit anoints and empowers all sorts of people, All kinds of unusual servants to be in special relationship with.

Men and women, young and old, rich or poor, dark-skinned or light, Gay or straight, ALL inspired people who—like the chosen and inspired servant—morning by morning, listen for a

word of teaching that is directed, not only to their lives, or family, or church alone...but to others...to ALL including those at the margins of life.

Today God is saying to us: Here are my servants...all whom I uphold. YOU...each of You are my chosen...in whom my soul delights.

I have put my Spirit upon YOU...

- To bring forth justice
- To live in righteousness
- To be a light to the nations
- To open eyes that are blind
- To bring out prisoners from the dungeons that trap them

YOU are my chosen...I have put my Spirit upon you!

~Awaken to that Spirit

~Listen for the Spirit

~Encourage the world empowered by that same Spirit of God! May it be so, Amen and amen.