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 **Sermon Study**

 **Isaiah 49:1-6**

***Church Year***

This text is appropriate for many seasons of the church year. It could serve in Advent as one of the prophecies of the Savior. It serves as the Old Testament lesson for the second Sunday after Epiphany in Series A, and for the Baptism of our Lord in Series B. Its mention of the humiliation of our Savior makes it appropriate in Lent, and the emphasis on the gospel to the nations commends it for the Pentecost season. The imagery of restoration and salvation allows it so serve appropriately in the End Times Sundays. Whenever a congregation schedules its Mission and Ministry Sunday, Isaiah 49:1-6 could serve as the sermon text.

***The Text***

*Verse 1 - Listen to me, you islands;
   hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the LORD called me;
   from my mother’s womb he has spoken my name.*

The speaker calls on the islands and distant nations, showing that God wants the gospel to be spoken to peoples beyond Israel (see also Isaiah 24:15, 42:4, and 60:9). Islands and distant nations could be two separate groups, one nearer and the other farther, or parallelism. In either case, we think of ourselves, living far beyond the land of Old Testament Israel, and we think of the nations on the other side of the earth from us, particularly China and the other countries of Southeast Asia.

The speaker is Christ, although that may not be apparent until verse five, where he is identified as the Servant who is the one “to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself.” It is a great comfort to us that God’s plan of salvation was carefully planned since before the world began, not something haphazard and thrown together as God went along.

Our young people who present themselves to train for the ministry of the gospel give prayerful consideration to future service in the church. They are not always sure of how the Lord will use them. Jesus had his name spoken by our heavenly Father from before birth as the one not just to speak the Word of God but to be the Savior himself. He knew what his mission was.

*Verse 2 - He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
   in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
   and concealed me in his quiver.*

The sword of the mouth of the speaker is the Word of God. A similar expression in English is, “Let me make myself perfectly clear.”See Hebrews 4:12 for further development of the sword imagery. The Word of the Lord is clear, no matter what language it is translated into. The language of being hidden and concealed reminds us of the humiliation of Christ, when, according to his Father’s will, he gave up making full use of his divine attributes. But he is still sharp and polished, carrying out his Father’s will perfectly.

*Verse 3 - He said to me, “You are my servant,
   Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”*

Jesus is called a servant because he fulfills the will of his Father. He says to his Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus is called Israel because of the people from whom he will come, because he is specially chosen by his Father (Malachi 1:2-5), and because of his suffering while carrying out the Father’s will (Matthew 26:42). God displays his splendor as he uses Word and sacrament to bring people of all nations to faith and to keep them in that saving faith.

*Verse 4 - But I said, “I have labored to no purpose;
   I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand,
   and my reward is with my God.”*

The steps of the humiliation—conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried—only begin to capture the long labor of our Savior on our behalf. He even experienced the temptation to despair (Luke 12:50), but he did not sin. He did not falter or become discouraged (2 Corinthians 4:8,9).

The Messiah is an example for every person who speaks the Word of God. Our work as a synod does not always show immediate rewards. But God promises that his Word will not return to him empty. As his servants, we trust that our work is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

*Verses 5,6 - And now the LORD says—
   he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
   and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD
   and my God has been my strength—****6*** *he says:
“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
   to restore the tribes of Jacob
   and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
   that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”*

Even though Jesus has a difficult task, he calls himself honored. Our pastors, teachers, and missionaries have difficult tasks, but they consider it an honor to serve the Lord in the way that the church asks them. The work of the Lord, the mission of the church, is to take the word of salvation to the ends of the earth. The Savior is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Luke 2:32).

***Homiletical Suggestions***

*Option A*

Our synod’s work of ministerial education and missions can be highlighted with Jesus at the center of all of our work.

I Will Make You a Light for the Gentiles

1. Our synod’s ministerial education students prepare themselves to take the gospel anywhere in the world.
2. Jesus was prepared from eternity to be our Savior.
3. Our synod’s missionaries take the Word to the Gentiles.
4. Jesus is the light for the Gentiles.

*Option B*

We give glory to God by joining together to train our pastors, teachers, and missionaries, and then to send them out to our congregations, schools, and other missions. This joint work is blessed when it focuses on Jesus, the Light of the World.

Jesus Is the Light

1. He shines through his Word, the focus of study for our ministerial education students.
2. He reveals God’s glory, the motivation of our joint work.
3. He shines to the ends of the earth, where our missionaries serve.