

**Epiphany 2**  
**“God Has A Better Plan”**  
**Isaiah 49:1-7**

*“Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth He has had mention of my name.”*

ABC News recently highlighted a some garbage men who made a difference.

I thought I would share their story with you...

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What really stayed with me is when the mom said that the compassion of these garbage men helped her family limp along. They didn't solve every problem, they simply reminded this family that there are people who care. We can all do that. To serve the Lord by serving others isn't always easy. In fact, so much of life seems like frustration filled with failure. But God has a plan, a greater plan, and He is accomplishing so much even when we aren't seeing the results we had hoped for.

Anytime you serve the Lord, which really is every single day, anytime you serve the Lord in this world of sin, there will be frustration. Strive to make a difference for the Lord anyway. Do it anyway.

There was a great church father named St. Augustine. He lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and he had a commanding presence as a preacher and accomplished so much for the Lord. But in 1990 scholars found 26 of his sermons, unknown and unread. He wrote that in many of his sermons, people would stand up and argue with him, and then argue with each other... to the point that he would have to stop preaching and tell the congregation “Stop grumbling until I'm done with my sermon.” Frustration filled with failure.

Moses, his outstretched arms represented God's Power, and he was God's spokesman, but people grumbled at him all the time. Frustration filled with failure. Rahab, David, Mary, those disciples, throughout Scripture, God chooses people who are weak in order to shame the strong and to show that God Alone Is In Control.

Our text is from an area of the book of Isaiah known as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Servant Song. We're going to see this passage speak to us, reminding us that serving the Lord in each of our lives is not always easy, but God has an amazing plan and can accomplish His good even through our times of frustration.

Isaiah has preached and preached. He has called people to repentance for their idolatry, their greed, their injustice. But the people didn't listen. And now Isaiah is proclaiming that God's people will be taken into captivity in Babylon because they broke their covenant with God. They rejected Isaiah, but more importantly they rejected God!

Isaiah is frustrated. Nobody listened. Frustration filled with failure. "I have labored in vain" he says. But do you know what God says? The God who had a plan for Isaiah even before Isaiah was conceived in the womb, says "You know, I don't think calling Israel to repentance is enough. Now I'm calling you to be a light to the Gentiles as well. I want you to bring the news of salvation to the ends of the earth!"

God's response is remarkable! In apparent failure, God gave Isaiah MORE WORK to do, not less. God was working His plan, His will, through Isaiah's message! **"Isaiah, You keep calling people to repentance and faith, not just to the Jews of Israel, but to everyone, and let Me take care of the results."** No matter how challenging, God tells Isaiah **I am in control. What you are doing is all part of my plan. Trust Me.**

**This passage doesn't just apply to Isaiah. This passage most importantly applies to Jesus Christ. Jesus is Perfect Suffering Servant who fulfills this prophecy from Isaiah 49** He labored to little effect: Jesus preaches. Jesus performs miracles. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God has arrived....

But there was little effect. When Jesus didn't want to become the Bread King, people left Him. On Good Friday, it appeared to all the world that the life of Jesus could be described as Frustration Filled With Failure.

But God had a greater plan. Through Christ's death on the cross, Jesus was **"Pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him; and by His wounds we are healed."** Jesus said, "when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to Myself."

God had a better plan than what the world immediately saw or understood.

You know what? This passage applies to us, too. The Church today moves slowly forward. Last week, Pastor Maske mentioned the persecution of the church that is taking place around the world today. Christians are dying for the faith today. In our own lives, we experience challenge and disappointment. At times, it appears our lives are nothing but frustration filled with failure.

But God calls us to keep loving, keep serving, keep making a difference in His Name (even if it is just in one person's life.) You see, the reason we show love, the reason we help other people limp along through this life on the way to seeing Jesus face to face, is to show the love and tender mercies of God. We strive to point others toward Jesus, His cross. His empty tomb, His power and deliverance in our lives.

Our labor done in the name of Jesus is never in vain, when it points someone to Jesus. You may have heard this poem, I think it's called "Do It Anyway."

**People may be unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.**

**If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.**

**The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.**

**People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for some underdogs anyway.**

**What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.**

**Give the Lord your best and the world may kick you in the teeth. Give the Lord your best anyway.**

Isaiah is to continue preaching because God has called Him and He is doing the Lord's work.

Jesus walked the way to the cross, forsaken by men, but completing the plan of salvation as The Father laid out.

And we too are called to reflect the Light and Love of our Savior. Isn't it amazing that God had a plan for each one of you even before He knit you together in your mother's womb? That He knew you by Name and that He had purpose for your life? And He directs your path, and equips you to accomplish His deeds of mercy. And that's important. It makes a difference.

God will use our meager efforts in amazing ways, because He has a better plan.