

Sermon followed by Service

January 14, 2024

Isaiah 49:1-6

What's your key to success? For some people, their key to success might seem obvious - they have it for all to see: good looks, a strong body, the right name to open doors, they get all the luck. For other people, the key to their success might be more of a secret: they work hard behind the scenes with little to show for it, their love is taken for granted, their smarts aren't appreciated, they get all the bad luck - they hardly look successful at all. So what's your key to success? If you're not sure, not sure about your key to success, maybe not even sure about your success, God lets us in on his secret, his secret to success. Thankfully, he's not keeping his secret secret from us.

Isaiah shows us God's "secret" to success; it's his "top-secret" weapon - **"Like a sharpened sword he hid me in the shadow of his hand; like a polished arrow he concealed me in his quiver."** Who was God's top-secret weapon? Someone hinted at, but hidden for thousands of years, God's top-secret weapon of success is Jesus. But we wouldn't say Jesus is a secret any more, would we? On Christmas the angels sang out his birth; last week we heard how the star pointed the way to find him; God has put Jesus on display for all the world to see; he's hardly a secret anymore.

What might seem to be more of a secret than Jesus is success itself. Where is it? Where is God's success? We look at the world God made – the land and sky, trees and flowers, birds and animals – so great, so beautiful – so ruined with death. Paul says all creation groans as in pains of childbirth waiting for this world to be over. And look at the crown of God's creation – mankind created in the image of

God, created showing off the greatness of God – but what happened? We turned against God. Read the news and what does mankind show off – destruction, depravity, and death. At times we might wonder – “Where is God’s success?” “Where is God in charge?” “Where is God’s answer to prayer?” “Where is God getting it done?” Sometimes God’s success seems like a secret – a secret we can’t see.

A secret we don’t see, because sometimes we look in the wrong places. We look for God’s success in the world or in people; and we don’t find God’s success because we forget to look where God points us. Now I’m not saying we can’t find God’s success out in the world, or that we won’t find God’s success in people – you are God’s success stories. But it’s not always easy to see God’s success out there or in me. So where does God tell us to find the secret to his success? In our lesson, God points to Jesus: “**You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.**” The secret is out! God shows his splendor, God works his success - in Jesus!

Jesus was God’s special project, God’s secret weapon. “**Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. 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.**” Jesus was specially chosen, specially named, specially formed by God to be his special servant to work his success.

You may know someone with their special hunting knife, and they sharpen and hone, sharpen and hone that blade until they get the perfect edge. Back home, mom had her special sewing scissors that was just right for the job. With that same care, God formed Jesus to perfection – true God, born of the virgin Mary – just right for the job. And just as those knives, those scissors stay hidden away until its time

to use them, (and don't anybody else touch them) in that same way, God kept Jesus hidden until the time was right.

Then, when the time was right, God let his secret out. It wasn't just with the angels and that special star in the sky that God showed his splendor, but in the baby Jesus. How so? In the baby Jesus, God himself wrapped up in skin and bones like ours, we see the love of God; we see what God is working for. We had lost touch with God, but Jesus took on skin and bones to put us back in touch with God. We had turned against God, but God came to walk with us and talk with us, to be with us instead of against us. In that little baby was God's secret weapon to put evil in its place and bring us back together with God.

How? Do you remember how Jesus said, “**God made my mouth like a sharpened sword**”? With the weapon of his word, Jesus cast out demons; with the power of his word, he made the dead alive; with the power of his word, he made the storm quiet; with the power of his word, he brought hearts close to God. All by the power of his word Jesus showed the splendor and success of God – God is greater than the devil, greater than death, greater than the world.

But the secret of God's success wasn't just talk. Without a word, Jesus showed the splendor and success of God's patience as the world slapped him and spit on him; and Jesus held back. On the cross, he showed the splendor and success of God's love for sinners, as Jesus, God himself, paid for the sins of the world. Then on Easter, Jesus showed God's splendor and success as he raised himself back to life. God's secret was out! Jesus did it! He beat the devil. He broke the power of death. He put evil in its place.

And yet sometimes God's success still seems a secret. In our lesson, Jesus looked at what he would accomplish. He saw his own people reject him, his own disciples doubt him and give up on him. Looking at our world, at who was with him or against him, looking for God's success, Jesus hurt - **"I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."** Looking at life in this world, Jesus couldn't see much success for himself or for God. But Jesus didn't just look at this world. Jesus looked to the LORD his God and found his success - **"Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."** Jesus knew: It didn't matter how things looked in this world, God had his reward! The same thing is true for us. It doesn't matter how against us things might look in this world, with Jesus we have the secret to God's success!

Looks can be deceiving. Jesus was seeing, **"I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing."** But God was telling him the exact opposite - **"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 you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."**

God had a plan. Part of that plan was that Jesus would bring the Jews back to God. But when God looked at Jesus, he said, "that's too small a job for you. You can do bigger and better than that; you will do bigger and better than that. You will bring the success of "my salvation to the ends of the earth." God's success isn't just for some small group of people over there. In Jesus, God's success is for you and for me and the whole world.

What does that mean for us? It can be so easy to fall into the trap of the world, so easy to get mixed up on what success is, on

where success is found. It's so easy to think that success is found in our stuff or what we get to do, that success is found in what people think of us; that success is found in getting our way and getting our happiness today. And then, when we don't have stuff, or our stuff is breaking apart; when it feels like what people think of us is not good; when we're not getting our way or getting our happiness today - it can be so easy to forget our real success. Our real success isn't found in this world, in what people think of us, in getting our way and getting our happiness today. Our real success is found in Jesus.

With Jesus, God isn't thinking small; God is thinking big, world-wide big, big enough to include you and me. And with you, God isn't thinking small - just a bit of blessing and happiness in the here and now. With Jesus, God is saving us from the here and now. Think of the worst of the here and now. What comes to mind? Some days, it might be your shame, your failures, your sin and guilt, the evil inside you? Some days it might be the evil, the hurt, the death out there and all around us.

Listen to Jesus on the cross. To the world the cross might not look or sound like success, but listen to Jesus on the cross: **“Father, forgive them.”** **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!”** **“It is finished!”** **“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”** There on the cross Jesus worked God's success. He took your sin, paid for your sin; in Jesus, you are forgiven, forgiven for life safe in the hands of God.

And for the evil and the hurt and the death out there and all around, listen to Jesus on Easter: **“Peace.”** No matter what evil the world worked against Jesus; no matter how Satan went after Jesus ... No matter what evil the world may be working against you; no matter how Satan may be going after you - Listen to Jesus on Easter:

“Peace.” And listen to Jesus with Easter: **“I have overcome the world.” “I will be with you always.” “Do not let your heart be troubled. I am coming to take you home with me.”**

How about that for success? In your baptism, that’s for you! In your baptism, forgiven and alive with God, you have access to God, you have connection with God, you have the God who created the universe, the God who raises the dead - you have God for you. And he’s not thinking small for you. He sees you right and alive and together with Jesus judging and ruling the universe forever. That’s true no matter how successful or unsuccessful you might feel today. God sees you right and alive and together with Jesus living and enjoying life the way it’s supposed to be forever. That’s the success God has for you in Jesus.

Let’s not keep it a secret - from yourself or anybody else.
Amen.

January 13 & 14, 2024

GATHERING RITE FOR BAPTISM

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... how many are already tired of the new year, already down-sizing their hopes and plans?

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we hear how, when the Father considered and equipped his Son Jesus, he up-sized his plans. We have that Jesus for us and with us in Baptism!

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**



Bap - tized in - to your name most ho - ly, O Fa - ther,
I claim a place, though weak and low - ly, A - mong your

Son, and Ho - ly Ghost,
saints, your cho - sen host, Bur - ied with Christ and dead to

sin. Your Spir - it now shall live with - in.

M: I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

C: **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 3:5,6)**

M: Surely we were sinful at birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us. (Psalm 51:5)

C: **But we were washed, we were sanctified, we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11)**

My lov - ing Fa - ther, there you took me To be hence -
 My faith - ful Sav - ior, there you let me The fruit of
 forth your child and heir.
 all your sor - rows share. O Ho - ly Spir - it, com - fort
 me When threat - 'ning clouds a - round I see.

M: As baptized children of God, we confess our sins.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

My faith - ful God, you fail me nev - er; Your pro - mise
 Oh, cast me not a - way for - ev - er If words and
 sure - ly will en - dure.
 deeds be - come im - pure. Have mer - cy when I come de -
 filed; For - give, lift up, re - store your child.

M: Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27). Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

All that I am and love most dear - ly— Re - ceive it
 Let me con - fess my faith sin - cere - ly, And help me
 all, O Lord, from me.
 your own child to be! Let noth - ing that I am or
 own Serve an - y will but yours a - lone.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father in heaven, at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, you proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Keep us who are baptized into Christ faithful in our calling as your children, and make us heirs with him of everlasting life; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 49:1-7

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.

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.
He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.
Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."

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—
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."

This is what the LORD says—
the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,
to the servant of rulers:
"Kings will see you and stand up,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 2D

Refrain



Great are the works of the LORD. Al-le - lu - ia! Al-le - lu - ia! Great are the works of the LORD.

Tone



Why do the nations / conspire
 and the peoples / plot in vain?
 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together a- /
 gainst the LORD
 and against his A- / nointed. *Refrain*

The One enthroned in / heaven laughs;
 the Lord / scoffs at them.
 He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, / saying,
 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy / mountain." *Refrain*

I will proclaim the / LORD's decree:
 He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your / Father."
Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
 and to the Holy / Spirit,
 as it was in the be- / ginning,
 is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain*

SECOND READING

Romans 6:1–11

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.
Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 1:4–11

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message:

“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“To Jordan’s River Came Our Lord”

Hymn 377

To Jordan’s river came our Lord, the Christ, whom heav’nly hosts adored,
the God from God, the Light from Light,
the Lord of glory, pow’r, and might.

The Savior came to be baptized— the Son of God in flesh disguised—
to stand beneath the Father’s will and all his promises fulfill.

As Jesus in the Jordan stood and John baptized the Lamb of God,
the Holy Spirit, heav’nly dove, descended on him from above.

Then from God’s throne with thund’rous sound
came God’s own voice with words profound:
“This is my Son,” was his decree, “the one I love, who pleases me.”

The Father’s word, the Spirit’s flight anointed Christ in glorious sight
as God’s own choice, from Adam’s fall to save the world and free us all.

Now rise, faint hearts: be resolute! This man is Christ, our substitute!
He was baptized in Jordan’s stream, proclaimed Redeemer, Lord supreme.

REMEMBRANCE OF BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is the priceless means of grace by which our Father in heaven connects us with Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote: "All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Again Paul wrote: "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

In Holy Baptism, God takes away our sins and gives us new life. We reject the devil and confess that we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

I ask you: Do you reject the devil along with all his lies and empty promises?

Yes, and I ask God to help me.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?

**Yes, I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son?

**Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

**He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?
**Yes, I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Is it your sincere prayer and desire to remain faithful to your Lord Jesus, to value the Word and sacraments, and to live a life that pleases God?
Yes, and I ask God to help me.

May the eternal God, who saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, bless you and keep you to everlasting life.
Amen.

HYMN

"God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It"
Hymn 679

God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ!
He, because I could not pay it, gave my full redemption price.
Do I need earth's treasures many? I have one worth more than any
that brought me salvation free, lasting to eternity!

Sin, disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ!
I have comfort even stronger: Jesus' cleansing sacrifice.
Should a guilty conscience seize me since my baptism did release me
in a dear forgiving flood, sprinkling me with Jesus' blood?

Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ!
Drop your ugly accusation, I am not so soon enticed.
Now that to the font I've traveled, all your might has come unraveled,
and, against your tyranny, God, my Lord, unites with me!

Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ!
When I die, I leave all sadness to inherit paradise!
Though I lie in dust and ashes faith's assurance brightly flashes:
Baptism has the strength divine to make life immortal mine.

There is nothing worth comparing to this lifelong comfort sure!
Open-eyed my grave is staring: even there I'll sleep secure.
Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising:
I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise!

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Loving Father, lead us to rejoice every day as we remember our baptism.
When we sin against you and others, give us power to put down the sinful
nature that was drowned in the water of baptism. When we doubt your
love, cause us to remember the promises you made when we came to the
font. When we feel weak, invigorate us with the hope of eternal life that
awaits all who are baptized and believe in you.

Keep in your care all our brothers and sisters who are suffering in sickness,
enduring hardship, carrying a cross, or mourning the death of someone
they love. Let them also return to their baptism and remember the blessings
you bestowed on them through the water and the Word. Keep all the
baptized in your care and bring us at last to the river of the water of life in
heaven.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people.
Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and
grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom
come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who
trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and
ever. Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER

M: O Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on your faithful
people. Keep us strong in your grace and truth, protect and comfort us in
all temptation, and bestow on us your saving peace, through Jesus Christ,
our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now
and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another.
Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“All Who Believe and Are Baptized”

Hymn 692

All who believe and are baptized shall see the Lord’s salvation;
baptized into the death of Christ, they are a new creation;
through Christ’s redemption they shall stand
among the glorious, heav’nly band of ev’ry tribe and nation.

With one accord, O God, we pray: grant us your Holy Spirit;
help us in our infirmity through Jesus’ blood and merit;
grant us to grow in grace each day that by this sacrament we may
eternal life inherit.

OFFERING

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