

Sunday, September 16, 2018 – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
“Vindicated”

Isaiah 50: 4-10

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Analogy

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I have to tell you, I've never really gotten into reality TV shows but I know there are many shows about different kinds of jobs. There are shows about logging crews and life on commercial fishing boats. There are shows set behind the scenes in mechanic's garages and in pawn shops. There are shows about fashion designers and making really fancy cakes. Some shows are truly bizarre – Ice Road Truckers? Who thought of making a show based on this, seriously? One of the oldest shows in this reality-job genre is Cops. And then, there's the show about jobs most people would never want to do – Dirty Jobs.

I have to tell you, when I have stopped to watch any of these shows, I find myself wondering what it would be like to do these jobs. Many of these jobs require a special skill set, or a certain level of physical strength, or a special mentality to be successful. Not just anyone can jump in and do them. Most of them aren't very appealing to me. Maybe some of these jobs are similar to yours, or a job you'd like to do – no offense, the jobs in these TV shows just aren't for me, and if you like them, that's ok. Perhaps, you look at me standing up here and think, “I'd never want that job.”

Our Old Testament reading today concerns a job most people wouldn't want to have. It's a job that sounds appealing, on the surface: Prophet. The task of a prophet was to preach with God's counsel to the people of Israel and Judah. There were many people these days who found being a prophet quite lucrative. Kings would surround themselves with prophets, who would live in the lap of luxury. Of course, these were just the Yes-man prophets, telling the king what he'd want to hear. Most people wouldn't want to be an actual prophet, because God's actual Word usually was full of a lot of warnings and judgment. The job of a prophet was usually to say what was unpopular.

To be God's voice sounds exciting – but even some of the greatest prophets begged off this charge. Moses wanted nothing to do with going to Pharaoh and demanding the release of Hebrew slaves. Jeremiah whined almost constantly about his life as a prophet, going so far as to say, “Cursed be the day I was born.” Jonah went so far as to literally run away – attempting to

sail in the total opposite direction of Nineveh, where God was calling him to serve. What about being a prophet would be so horrible as to engender this kind of reaction? Frankly, being a prophet was really hard. If a prophet was really saying what God had given him to say, you would think that people would want to hear it. After all, it would be God's Word to you. But the Word of a prophet is not usually loved or appreciated.

Our Old Testament text is a prophecy about God's Servant, who is yet to come. It is a prophecy written 700 years before Jesus was born. This Servant is Godly and righteous. He comes with an "instructed tongue," ready to preach God's Word truthfully. He comes hearing God rightly. He comes ready to obey whatever God has in store for Him.

Unfortunately for our Servant, we should not expect Him to be well received. The reason is, like kings surrounding themselves with yes men, waiting to hear what they want to hear, the world does not want to hear what God really says. That makes the Servant's job much harder. The world will not honor the Servant. The Servant will suffer. The Servant is accused. The Servant is condemned. The life of this Servant will not be easy.

Yet, something is quite different about the Servant than the other prophets from the Old Testament. He obeys God's charge, without any kind of grumbling. He "sets his face like flint," undeterred by false accusations against him, by mocking, by physical torture. I'm reminded of William Wallace at the end of Braveheart, being gruesomely tortured as he is simultaneously tempted to admit guilt and beg for mercy – but He cedes no ground. He believes He is right.

We meet this Servant in the narrative of the Gospels. This Servant tells His disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." It is this Servant that is described preaching God's Word throughout the country, making enemies of the religious establishment. It is this Servant about whom it is often said, "His face is set toward Jerusalem."

And still, this Servant, who is preaching the Word His Father sent Him to preach, who is healing the sick, casting out demons and raising the dead, is rejected. People accuse Him of lying against the very God who sent Him. He suffers – beaten, chained, flogged with a cat of nine tails, is ridiculed by soldiers and crowds, by a king. He is rejected by His own friends. Even still, He speaks God's truth. In a kangaroo court before the High Priest the Servant is asked,

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” The Servant answers, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” He cannot help but speak the truth His Father gives Him. And then, this Servant, innocent and doing what God commands, is crucified and dies.

This is a strange death. An innocent Servant, with an “instructed tongue,” doing what God says and yet, judged and condemned. On the one hand, the accusation is unfair – He has done nothing wrong. On the other hand, this Servant’s real purpose is to accept the blame for everyone else, for those who aren’t innocent. His death is an acceptable sacrifice. He gets condemned for the wrongs of all God’s people. This, I guarantee you, is a job you do not want.

But what about the Servant? He has lived a righteous life, He doesn’t deserve this! If God allows this, then those false accusers and condemners and mockers might as well be right. But do you remember? Do you remember the attitude of the Servant? With His face, set like flint, certain in His cause, more than that, certain of the God who sent Him? Sure that He was doing His God’s will? What was He so certain about?

What He knew was in the end, for all the rejection the world could throw at Him, God is His vindication. With one act, God set His Servant free from every false accusation and blame. In one act, the Servant, condemned to death on a cross, had His sentence reversed. Imagine that – a death sentence reversed – after someone dies. This isn’t a reversal in memory only – the death itself is undone. On Easter morning, Jesus Christ, God’s Servant rose, vindicated by His Father because He obeyed His Father even to death on a cross. He fulfilled God’s Law. His resurrection proves Him innocent.

And this most difficult and unenviable of jobs – to be the Servant who obeyed His Father where every prophet before Him had failed – comes with the very best of rewards. The Servant, Jesus, chose to take all the accusations, all the condemnation, all the suffering that we experience because of our own sin onto the cross with Him. Every wrong you’ve committed has been judged. The cost we deserve to pay for our sin, of eternal separation from God in Hell, is also fulfilled by Jesus. A promise of eternal life is made to us in baptism. On the day when Jesus returns, even our current suffering – whether it be of health, or financial hardship or relationship concerns – whatever it may be, will be undone. Even physical death, a

condemnation we will experience for our sin, will be reversed because of this Servant. Because the Servant kept God's favor, you and I are also vindicated.

As you confess your sin, know that God has forgiven you already. I've spoken to a few people lately that know this, up here, but don't know it down here. Your sin was carried with the Servant and already judged. It's one thing if you're not sorry for your sin – but if you are sorry, if you do desire to change and you are still weighed down by guilt, if you feel like satan's accusations against you are true, if you fear God's condemnation, please, please – look at Christ who has vindicated you.

And then, joyful in that good news, we tell the world! God's Servant has already taken on the dirty job of suffering and being condemned so that we can be vindicated against the sin that plagues us. Thanks be to Him – it's a job that only He could do – and it is finished. In Jesus' name, Amen.