



*Notes for Adult discussion groups at
On-Line@9 Worship Service
on 20 January 2008*

'You've Only Just Begun!'

Isaiah 49 : 1-7

Listen to me, distant nations, you people who live far away! Before I was born, the Lord chose me and appointed me to be his servant. He made my words as sharp as a sword. With his own hand he protected me. He made me like an arrow, sharp and ready for use. He said to me, "Israel, you are my servant; because of you, people will praise me." I said, "I have worked, but how hopeless it is! I have used up my strength, but have accomplished nothing." Yet I can trust the Lord to defend my cause; he will reward me for what I do. Before I was born, the Lord appointed me; he made me his servant to bring back his people, to bring back the scattered people of Israel. The Lord gives me honour; he is the source of my strength. The Lord said to me, "I have a greater task for you, my servant. Not only will you restore to greatness the people of Israel who have survived, but I will also make you a light to the nations— so that all the world may be saved."

Israel's holy God and saviour says to the one who is deeply despised, who is hated by the nations and is the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you released and will rise to show their respect; princes also will see it, and they will bow low to honour you." This will happen because the Lord has chosen his servant; the holy God of Israel keeps his promises.

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The above passage is the second of the four so-called Servant Songs in which the Servant is the Messiah. He is 'Israel' in its ideal form. The nation was to be a 'Kingdom of Priests' (Exodus 19:6) but the Messiah would be the high priest who would atone for the sins of the world.

In this passage the way we may 'become' is suggested. Essentially the God who shapes us from the outset sets us off on the path of our 'becoming'. God names us.

1. How important is naming? Why has 'naming' become so closely linked with baptism in some traditions?
2. God calls us before our birth. What does that say about our nature and purpose in life? What bearing does it have on our potential?
3. In a passage full of contrasts what are we to make of 'words as sharp as a sword' in the same verse as 'with his own hand he protected me'? Does this reflect our own experience in any way?

God has huge expectations of us. Are we prepared? God offers preparation in a period of intimacy and nurture - the shadow of his hand, the safety of the quiver - and then clothes us with strength. The mission is global, but we aren't expected to do things alone. Do we follow this process of resting and allowing God to nurture us, seeing ourselves as honoured by God and letting ourselves feel God's loving protection and strength fill us before we take action?

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