

To the End of the Earth
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Isaiah 49:1-7

¹ Listen to me, O coastlands,
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born,
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
² He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
in his quiver he hid me away.
³ And he said to me, 'You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'
⁴ But I said, 'I have labored in vain,
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the Lord,
and my reward with my God.'

⁵ And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength—
⁶ he says,
'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'

⁷ Thus says the Lord,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
'Kings shall see and stand up,
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.'

John 1:29-42

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' ³²And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, 'Look, here is the Lamb of God!' ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to him, 'Rabbi' (which translated means Teacher), 'where are you staying?' ³⁹He said to them, 'Come and see.' They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter).

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth," says God to Isaiah. Jesus tells us through Matthew 5: "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."¹ And John calls out to Jesus saying, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Genesis tells us God created this world, every corner and every inch and every creature, and called it good. God is saying here, "I cherish the whole of the world - I made it all and I have come through Jesus to save it all" and God is saying here, "don't keep for yourselves the good news, the news of my love for this whole world - a vital part of my love is that it is shared, everywhere and with everyone." There was a day when this was understood to convey a goal of conversion of the world to Christianity. More modern

¹ Matthew 5:15-16.

theology allows, perhaps we could say makes room for, the Holy Spirit to be at work in God's plans of salvation for the world, leaving us to play a part, not by conversion, but by loving in God's name. Loving every corner, every inch, and every creature.

This part we are called to play is not soft or cuddly, full of bouquets and teddy bears. The love we are called to is what got Jesus crucified and the Rev. Dr. King assassinated; the love we are called to is the same love Jesus prescribed for the man who asked about eternal life: "go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."² The love we are called to puts others' needs over our wants. The love we are called to risks much for the sake of others. The love we are called to is uncomfortable. The love we are called to releases our privilege so others may also have opportunity. The love we are called to is named justice, mercy, kindness, humility. The love we are called to looks like invitation, welcome, letting go, speaking up, speaking out. This is dangerous love. This is revolutionary love. This is world-changing love. And we are meant to carry it to the end of the earth.

Dr. King preached a sermon on world-changing love at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church November sixty years ago. He had much to say in his sermon entitled "Loving Your Enemies" but, for today, this is what I wish to share - he said:

Another way that you love your enemy is this: When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time which you must not do it. There will come a time, in many instances, when the person who hates you most, the person who has misused you most, the person who has gossiped about you most, the person who has spread false rumors about you most, there will come a time when you will have an opportunity to defeat that person. It might be in terms of a recommendation for a job; it might be in terms of helping that person to make some move in life. That's the time you must do it. That is the meaning of love. In the final analysis, love is not this sentimental something that we talk about. It's not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all... It is the refusal to defeat any individual. When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system... There is a power in love that our world has not discovered yet. Jesus discovered it centuries ago. Mahatma Gandhi of India discovered it a few years ago, but most men and

² Matthew 19:21.

most women never discover it. For they believe in hitting for hitting; they believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; they believe in hating for hating; but Jesus comes to us and says, "This isn't the way."... We must discover the power of love, the power, the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that we will be able to make of this old world a new world. We will be able to make [people] better. Love is the only way. Jesus discovered that.³

World-changing, dangerous, revolutionary love. It is too light a thing for us to raise up people like us, however you understand that, with love. We are being strengthened and sent by God to be light to the nations, to love the world over, every corner, every inch, every creature, so that God's salvation, God's redeeming love, may reach to the end of the earth. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world. I have said to you before that sin is the turning away from God. Jesus came to turn the world back toward God. We are certainly not Jesus but we, too, are able to turn others back toward God, corner by corner, inch by inch, creature by creature. The Lord, who is faithful, has chosen you. God grant us strength, each and every one of us.

Let us pray: God, you have called us to a mighty love - through your Spirit, send us out and, with your Spirit, back us up, we pray. Amen.

³ http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documententry/doc_loving_your_enemies/