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Senior Sermon  
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Those were beautiful words that were put down into Isaiah 49. It is a passage where God mentions that he has a servant. A servant that God loves, upholds, and has chosen. This isn't just any ordinary servant. According to God, this is the man who will bring justice to the world that will not grow faint or be crushed. Did I mention that this justice will not be established by a great uprising or war? Rather it will come about through quietly. Not even a dimly burning wick will be blown out in the night by this person. It's all in a day's work!

This Isaiah passage is just one of four in the book of Isaiah that were noticed. The four passages are called servant songs. The common theme between them being that there is this brilliant servant who is a messiah figure—there doesn't seem to be a problem in the world that he cannot fix. Understandably, a lot of effort has gone on over the years to discover who exactly this servant is. Some say it's Moses; others think it was Zerubbabel—the first king to return Jews from their long suffering torment in captivity. Then again other scholars assume that this servant was Cyrus the great, founder of the Persian Empire. That's understandable, too, since he did thwart the Babylonian Empire and allowed the people of Israel to go home after spending decades in exile. Of course, the servant has also been mentioned to be Jesus. Jesus Christ especially fits the fourth passage of the servant songs called “The Suffering Servant”. The story of the suffering servant mirrors very well to the stories of the gospel where the innocent servant is put to death, but his death bears the sin of many and allows righteousness to spread to those people. Matthew even cites the first four verses of today's reading as prophecy to Jesus' coming. Being that I myself am a Christian I love the servant being interpreted as Jesus Christ.

Yet in the notes of my *Harper Collins Study Bible*, it suggests another idea for who this servant might be: God's chosen people of Israel. Now this interpretation was strange to me. Why would God choose a people as fickle as the Israelites? If *The Bible* has told me one thing, it's that the Israelites were a wishy-washy bunch who sinned repeatedly. They needed prophets from God to warn them of their sinful ways every other week. How could the Israelites possibly bring justice to our world—it's a place that has been corrupt for at least the past few millennia? Not only that Isaiah said that all the prisoners will be freed from the darkness, and the blind will finally be able to see!

Our church today seems to be no less fickle than the Israelites were back in the Old Testament. We still have our petty differences and find important reasons to split up into many denominations. There still seem to be problems in the world that we ourselves cannot solve. Yet the Isaiah text still prophesizes that we will solve our problems in the world. Is it possible?

Maybe the servant song's prediction of world justice is possible. Community in general seems to have a huge impact on the world. I know community has benefitted and molded me in several ways. My church has provided me friendship and learning so I could grow as a person in my faith and values. Back in high school, I called several of my neighbors after they got home from work to give me a ride home from track practices before I got my license. They never grumbled when they gave me a ride home, and we had good conversations. My hometown of Cottonwood has even rewarded me with kind scholarships to help pay for college. One of Augustana's core values is even community, and I can honestly say I've noticed it. The people I have met here have all offered an education about life in a safe, comforting environment. One of my favorite experiences of community, however, has to be singing with seventy-one other voices in the Augustana Choir. It's inspiring to see the power that an ensemble of people standing together producing harmonies can have on an audience.

Yes, I've seen what a community can do and I appreciate their charity, but then I realized a problem: what about those times that I've shunned opportunities to help people in need? There are many I can think of. What about the people living in poverty here in Sioux Falls that I haven't bothered to help? Sorry, I don't have the time. There are times when my friends need someone to talk to. Sorry, I have a test tomorrow. Sometimes there are interesting service and lecture events to take part in on campus. Sorry, I'm too tired; wait until I'm a doctor and can actually contribute. Have I actually been doing my part as a Christian to participate in a community that can make a difference in the world?

Community is a very important thing to the church and has been since its beginning. We only have to look at this first week of Epiphany to understand why. It's the week we celebrate the beginning of Jesus' ministries, and his baptism by John in the river Jordan. Jews recognize the importance of one to be washed in order to be able to go out in service to the world. In a sense, the baptisms done by John is a reaffirmation of this commitment to the helping the world as a community. In baptism, followers had a chance to be cleansed to help make a world that has gone completely wrong right.

There were problems that had to be fixed for Jews in Jesus' day. Just before Jesus has been baptized, Matthew tells us about how Herod massacred all children around and under two years of age. Not to mention Rome was still in power. Israel was not free, and friends and family were crucified on crosses so all could see that injustice still ruled supreme.

Fast forward two thousand years. We still haven't seen to got any better at making the world right. Genocides still happen. Children still go home hungry at night. And yet as long as we have this Isaiah servant song, there is hope. God has faith in his servant Israel. For some reason that I can't understand, he has chosen us. According to God, we will faithfully bring forth justice and have righteousness. We are part of a community that can change the world. Let us remember that in our own baptism.