

¹Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

It can be pretty easy to get caught up in watching a court room drama on TV, or with others legal problems, or with some else's guilt or innocence; trying to figure out what the verdict will be. But it's very different when we're the ones being accused, or on trial.

Today's Old Testament text is the first of four servant songs from Isaiah; it brings a courtroom scene for each one of us; In Isaiah 41 we see a courtroom drama in which the children of Israel are on trial.

They have been given a special covenant relationship with God. As a mark of this special relationship, they have been given the Holy Law: The 10 Commandments. they've been told: I will be your God; you will be my people. Here's my Word, and be faithful to it all your days.

A special promise or covenant marks this relationship; and because they are chosen by God and have this covenant relationship; they are to be witnesses to the whole world of who the one true God is and how great He is.

And now the people of God are on trial, because they have broken their promise, they have broken the covenant, they have not kept God's Holy Law. They have been a poor witness to the world. And the worst of all—they have committed idolatry in the land that God gave them.

False gods, money, power, sex, and even themselves. They are on trial and the case against them is air-tight. Witness after witness is brought forward.

The children of God, the accused have nothing to say—they have no defense, they are speechless, because they know they are guilty.

In **Isaiah 41:21-22, 24**, the Lord God says to the idols: ²¹Set forth your case, says the LORD; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. ²²Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. ²⁴Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.

Isaiah 41:28-29 ⁸But when I look there is no one; among these there is no counselor who, when I ask, gives an answer. ²⁹Behold, they are all a delusion; their works are nothing; their metal images are empty wind.

They sit there in their shame waiting for the announcement. And the verdict is...? There is shock and pandemonium. The almighty God, the maker of the heaven and the earth, the only one who is a just judge pronounces that they are not guilty.

Instead, he pronounces judgment against the idols, against the things they have been worshipping. The idols stand guilty, they're the ones that are truly mute, they're the ones who cannot speak, because they have no breath in them. they are the ones that are guilty.

The children of Israel are in disbelief by such an absurd outcome. Then comes Isaiah 42. The answer to the justice question; how can justice be served?

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Jesus is the one who will come and establish justice by bringing forth the honorable and just verdict. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the suffering servant prophecies

The justice Jesus brings seems very illogical. It seems like the wrong verdict. It seems completely backwards. In a true judicial system, where justice is always served; you know how the verdict goes; the guilty are condemned, and the innocent are set free.

The Children of Israel are guilty, everybody knows it, but in his grace, in his love, in his mercy, in his compassion he sends his Son to serve. How does he serve? he serves by fulfilling the Law that the people of God continually break. he serves by taking the sin of the world into himself.

Luther writes: "He is calling us away from errors and therefore showing us someone else.... The prophet points us to the incarnate one and says that in this Head alone, in the unity of faith, we who were formerly scattered must be brought together.... This was not written for Christ's sake but for ours, so that we may be sure about His work and teaching and may have certainty about the emptiness of our idolatry..."

...Nobody understands these things unless he believes. You must believe that Christ is a servant. It is as Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2:2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

He serves justice, and he serves his people by innocently bleeding and dying—carrying out the death sentence. Our suffering servant Jesus died so that the guilty may go free.

This is more than a history lesson from Isaiah. We are the new Israel—God's Covenant people. We have been given God's Holy law, and God has appointed us to be a light to the nations, to be a testimony to the one true God, father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In today's gospel, when Jesus was baptized, "**immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him;** ¹⁷**and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**"

He has put his Word and his Spirit in us in the waters of Holy Baptism washing us clean and setting us free, and how do we live? How do we respond? How do we act?

We break his Holy Law! We defy his promises! We've been false witnesses by our thoughts, words and deeds, and worst of all we have worshipped false idols. We have taken the gifts that God has given us and turned them into our Gods.

We have taken our rest and leisure and used it as an excuse to stay away from God. We have listened to every and any voice in the world and yet closed our ears—at least filtered our ears to God's Word.

We have worshipped at the altar of pride and selfishness, power and prestige, and the list goes on and on and on. We stand guilty!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we're on trial—the verdict is about to be announced. We hang our heads in shame for what we have done, and for what we have left undone. Can there be any hope? Can there be any reprieve. Can there be any loophole we can cling to- to somehow beat the wrap? NO

Unlike the judicial systems in our world, God's justice is perfect! It's certain and sure. God announces for the whole world to hear-*You are not guilty!*

The Good News of the Gospel is that God's verdict of condemnation, and death has been placed upon Jesus, instead of you.

Jesus suffers what we should suffer; he dies the death we deserve. In the greatest victory proclamation ever heard, Jesus proclaims the verdict from the Cross. And the verdict is? It is Finished! It is accomplished—For You!

Eternal life is a guarantee, sealed by the very death and resurrection of Jesus. God knows how difficult this journey is—the ups and downs, the hopes and fears, the worries, the constant temptation. The loneliness and despair.

Our suffering Savior knows our hurts, when we are weak, He is strong. He is there to pick us up, to hold us, to lift us up, to comfort us, to encourage us. He will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will faithfully bring forth a verdict: *Not Guilty!* We live in a world of darkness and slavery of our idolatry. Jesus is the light of the world who sets us free.

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: “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.” (Rom. 6:4)

Jesus says hear my Word; return to the baptismal font; die there everyday with your sins and evil lusts, and rise again a new creation to serve him in freedom and joy.

In Christ Jesus, God's verdict in that you are Not Guilty! Thanks be to God. Amen.