

HERE I STAND FOR LIFE
SECOND SUN. AFTER EPIPHANY

ISA 49:1-7
JAN 15, 2017

- ¹ Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar.
The Lord called me from the womb,
from the body of my mother he named my name.
- 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 right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God."
- ⁵ And now the Lord says,
he who formed me from 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 eyes 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 bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for 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 nation, the servant of rulers:
"Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;
because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."
- If you were driving in the city and saw an animal, say a cow,
standing on top of a building, you would think
that is not a good place for it to be,
but also know it didn't get there by itself & not leaving by self.
It was put there on purpose.
- Isaiah is saying he and all Israel, especially Jesus
and us as individuals & church today is like cow on roof.
We are in difficult position but are put here for a purpose.
This year is 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting
95 theses about sale of indulgences because of the truth
that we are saved only through faith in God's grace.
Later, when he was called to give up his position on this
he said, "Here I Stand, I can do no other, God help me.
It was indeed God who made him stand where he did.
God put him in that position, that place and time for a purpose,
and God had given him the truths in his word
that were the basis of spiritual life.

Jan. 22nd, next Sun., is also an anniversary,
44th anniversary of Supreme court decision
legalizing abortion on demand.
which is annual reminder of real value & purpose of human life.
Our position as Christians is that human life, from conception
until natural death is precious and is to be preserved.
We stand on this position because of what God has given us
in his word and because God is the giver of physical life.
So, as Isaiah says, I STAND IN THE BODY GOD GAVE ME
I STAND WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD
I STAND READY TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS

I STAND IN THE BODY GOD GAVE ME

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and give attention, you peoples from afar.
The Lord called me from the womb,
from the body of my mother he named my name.
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Israel, in whom I will be glorified."

When human babies are born, they don't stand up right away.
It takes a while for them to get used to having a body,
getting control of those little hands waving around,
turning over and eventually balancing on feet.
Bodies can continue to be awkward, inconvenient, uncooperative.
Ever since the fall into sin, we feel need to cover them up,
along with their sores, smells and noises.
We may be frustrated with their shape or size
and their hard to control urges & appetites, aches & pains.
No wonder ancient Greeks had believed in dualism,
idea bodies are just something we happen to have
while the real us is the spirit waiting to be freed from the body.
For some, idea that body didn't matter much led to being stoics,
who saw little value in providing comforts for the body.
For others it led to being epicureans who thought the body
might as well freely enjoy any pleasure no matter what.
Even without being philosophical, these same ideas persist today
in attitudes that on one hand, bodies are like commodities to be
valued for how they look, modified or commercialized at will,
while on the other hand body can be used to do whatever it feels
without worrying about the effect on the real us.

And if pregnancy results, that is just some piece of body,
not a real person with its own life.

And if a body becomes weak or painful or hard to control
we can decide for ourselves to be done with it.

And if body we happen to be born with doesn't fit with
who we feel we really are, we can just ignore that
or maybe even change it for ourselves.

And now some are considering if we can take the real us
out of a body all together and put it in a man-made machine.

But the Bible gives a different understanding of the body.

God created people to be body and soul intimately united
and each fully affected by the other.

God has intentionally given each of us the body we have,
with a purpose and design before we are conceived & born,
an eternal purpose for which it will be resurrected
and joined forever with our spirit.

Because of this, God himself, Jesus, was born with a human body.

His body was essential in his work to save us by his death
and his resurrection with the body.

One of his ways to give us this forgiveness and salvation
is with his body and blood in Holy Communion.

God has a special purpose for every person who is born
and every person who remains alive.

Isaiah says we are like arrows in his quiver
and his hand is over us to protect us.

God's plan includes bringing us together in his church
which he calls the body of Christ, where he lives within us.

This church, too, is a body for which he has special purpose,
no matter it's size or age and no matter how awkward
or uncoordinated it may seem to be.

This is why we end up standing wherever we are with God's help,
it the body God has given us, and why...

I STAND WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD

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I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my right is with the Lord,
and my recompense with my God."

⁷ Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers:
"Kings shall see and arise;
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves;
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

Little babies that are pretty wobbly and weak
can still stand confidently with a big grin on their faces
when an adult is holding on to them.
This is what all of us are like.
Isaiah says that despite God's plans for him he seems a failure.
both he and all Israel feel weak and worthless
and also despised and abhorred by others.
There are times when any of God's servants may feel this,
including the whole church - a hopeless failure.
This prophecy of Isaiah comes true in Jesus.
He was deeply despised and condemned by rulers.
When he was hanging on cross, his strength was spent
and it seemed his efforts were all wasted & worthless.
But his very rejection and suffering became the means
through which he was a blessing to the whole world.
Because God's hand was on him still and he was the Holy One;
he is our redeemer who makes us holy.
There may be unwanted infants who seem weak & worthless,
not worth giving birth to because of their problems,
or despised because of the problems their birth
would bring to those responsible for them.
There may be people with disabilities or miseries that result from
sickness or old age that also seem to have too many problems
for them or for those who take care of them.
so that they feel or seem worthless.
But Isaiah says, "yet surely my right is with the Lord."
It is the Lord who redeems us poor miserable sinners
who gives the right to life.
This is why the church stands boldly for life
even when it seems our voice is small and weak
and it seems we spend our strength for nothing
and it may even seem the church itself is a body not worth saving
but God's hand is still holding on to us.
And because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you,
God still has a plan for every one he holds on to
to use them as his servants to bless others.
This is why we do not just stand boldly in a defensive way, but

I STAND READY TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS

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I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

In Bible times, the rich and powerful sat
while posture of servants was standing,
standing by ready to serve.
Those who are going to reach out & give others a hand
need to have sure footing themselves.
This is why God has us stand in the positions we do,
not in pride, but ready to serve others.
God tells Isaiah that he made him for the purpose
of gathering Israel back to God, but more than that,
even when it seemed that job was too much for him,
God was using him for the larger goal
of being a light to all nations, including us today.
Ultimately these words were a prophecy true of Jesus.
He came as the promised savior of Israel,
But even while they were rejecting him
he was bringing salvation for the whole world.
Every life that is conceived & continues is precious in itself
but even those who can't even survive on their own
can still be used by God as a blessing to others.
The same is true of God's servant, the people of the church.
we have a lot of needs among ourselves,
but God's plan is still to use us as his servants
to reach out with help to others
who don't know how to handle an unexpected pregnancy,
who need hope and comfort especially for regrets
and forgiveness for guilt and shame,
who need comfort when in pain, help with disabilities,
and support in facing the fear of death ,
all of which God has given to us who need it, for us to share.
God is our strength who gives us life and makes us able to stand.
I STAND IN THE BODY GOD GAVE ME accepting it as it is.
I STAND WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD despite weakness or scorn
I STAND READY TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS
because God holds on to me so that I can help others
as long as I have life here until he gives me life in heaven.