

This past week, we witnessed something that this country hasn't seen in over 100 years. A political mess the likes of which hasn't occurred since before the Civil War. And for a full week, it brought the work of Congress to a standstill. I'm talk of course about the election of a new Speaker of the House.

Now, you know me, and you know I'm not one to turn a sermon into a political platform. Honestly, I don't have that strong of an opinion in this matter. But as I was watching this legislative gridlock unfold, what I heard from Kevin McCarthy's opponents is something that I think we all can sympathize with. Because, to be perfectly blunt, they don't trust him. He doesn't give them any hope. I'm not going to say whether they're right or wrong in that opinion. But I think we can understand how they feel.

Because trust is in short supply these days and hope is a fleeting thing. We find it hard to trust our politicians. They don't give us any hope. We find it hard to trust our doctors or scientists or health officials. They don't give us any hope. We find it hard to trust our teachers or university professors or journalists. They don't give us any hope.

And, to be perfectly blunt, all of you here today are kind of unusual. Because a great many Americans have decided that they don't trust their pastors or churches or religious institutions. They don't give them any hope.

The people of Isaiah's day felt something very similar. They were surrounded by people they wanted to trust. Places they vainly looked to for hope. But found constant disappointment.

They had hoped that their king could help them stay safe and prosperous through military might or political maneuvering. But then he let them down. They had hoped that they could somehow make their own way through life. But then their own strength failed them.

They had hoped that Isaiah's prophetic prediction of doom and defeat was just wrong. But every word of warning he gave them kept coming true. And, of course, they had hoped that maybe they could find salvation in Marduk and the false gods of Babylon or Baal, Asherah, and the false gods of Canaan. But, in the end, these gods were revealed for what they really were: lumps of stone and wood and metal. Nothing more.

We may not have many places to put our trust and hope anymore, but people still find plenty of idols to worship. Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing once said, "An idol is anyone or anything we believe will give us what only God can give. An idol is whatever we look at and say, 'If I can get that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure.'" Or, to put it another way, an idol is something we feel we cannot live without.

Think about that for a second. Which one would you say you couldn't live without this week: Church or your paycheck? Prayer or your car? God's Word or the internet?

Sinful human beings will always chase after money, luxury, sex, power, and success. They will look to princes and rulers to keep them safe and prosperous. They will look to their own good works or to the acclaim of others to give them meaning.

But all these idols are just pretenders. They are as powerless as lumps of stone, wood, or metal. They will fail you and leave you wondering why you ever trusted them.

It is for this exact reason that the Lord comes to Isaiah. Comes to his people. Comes to us. And says to those who cling to false hopes, "No! Here is my Servant." In the midst of all these choices. All these idols. All these failures to earn our trust and our hope. God puts forward his choice for hope and salvation. The one who will contend for us.

After spending all of chapter 41 ridiculing the idols of this world and their utter inability to do anything, God begins chapter 42 by saying, "*Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.*" God is saying, "OK, you've beheld everything this world offers to you and all it fails to do. Now take a look at my choice for trust and hope. Take a look at my Son. Take a look at Jesus."

Why can we trust in him? Why can we put our hope in him? Well, he says to Jesus in verse 6, *“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations.”* Every leader, every scholar, every authority on this earth is born in sin. Which means if they're going to do anything righteous in their lives, it will only be by the grace of God.

But God's chosen one isn't like that. He is called in righteousness. John the Baptist himself points that out. He says, *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* Jesus, you don't have any sin to repent of. You are the source of all grace. You should be baptizing me!

And how does Jesus reply? *“Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”* I have called you in righteousness and I have given you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations. Jesus isn't baptized to make himself righteous. No, he's baptized to be called in the midst of his righteousness and given as a covenant of grace to all people. A covenant of grace to us. A light for the nations. A light for you and me.

And so this Chosen One of God is set apart from every idol and every pretender by a special anointing of the Holy Spirit. An anointing which will not only empower him for his task, but also declare to everyone that he is the one set apart by God. The Lord promises in Isaiah that we will know His Chosen One because, *“I have put my Spirit upon him.”* And so, in His baptism, the Lord does just that.

No other person in history receives this kind of visible anointing, with the Spirit of God descending upon him in the form of a dove. No other person in history is guaranteed to do what Jesus does and bring what Jesus will bring for those who desperately need hope.

That's what makes the Servant of the Lord that Isaiah promises different from the pretenders. He *“will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street.”* He won't need to. Because he is chosen by God and upheld by him, he carries out his task in the quiet confidence of someone doing God's will.

And when this true Servant of the Lord is arrested and stands before Pilate facing all sorts of false accusations, he has no need to defend himself. So he remains silent. Because he is anointed by the Spirit, he doesn't need to depend on persuasive arguments or slick promotional campaigns to convince people he is able to bring God's justice to the world. He doesn't sell himself like a politician. He gives himself like a lamb to the slaughter.

Nor does he act like those pretenders who seek power and glory. He spends his ministry showing compassion to those weak and wavering, those near the breaking point, those whose faith is flickering. He won't tell you you need to try harder to escape your problem, or pray harder, or be more sincere in faith. He is different from the pretenders of this world. He comes to you and binds you up with his healing Word of forgiveness.

Most of all, this Servant of the Lord shines above all the pretenders of this world by actually doing what he says he can do. He is sent to set the prisoner free from the dungeon of darkness and sin, and that is exactly what he does. The false gods of this world only imprison us in sin and death. Jesus sets the prisoner free and brings light and life. He forgives sins and raises the dead. He rises from the dead and promises resurrection to all who believe.

Isaiah was sent with a prophecy revealing the Servant of the Lord. It was a message for those who would be tempted to find their own hope in the things of this world. It was a message for those whose misplaced trust was about to leave them with nothing but brokenness and death. It was a call to turn away from false gods and live.

We know that this one who was promised now has come. We have seen his glory manifested in the waters of the Jordan River. God has not only promised. He has delivered. And in him, he has delivered you. Amen.