

*“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. 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. And he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ 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.’ 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—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.’”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

A man went up to a workman at a construction site and asked, “What are you doing?” The man replied, “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m laying bricks.” The man went to the man next to him and asked, “What are you doing?” The man replied, “I’m constructing a wall.” He went down to the next man and asked, “What are you doing?” The man replied, “I’m helping build a cathedral to the glory of God.” Three men, all doing the same task—but one of them could see beyond the bricks and mortar. He was thinking about the wonderful cathedral that would be the end result of all the work. He is the kind of workman employers want—a worker who “thinks big”.

If a bricklayer can see himself building a cathedral to God’s glory, then surely that church which is *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,”* (Ephesians 2:20, ESV) will also want to think big as we think of all that the church, empowered and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, can do to the glory of God.

God wants His church to ‘think big’. In these Epiphany days we remember that the Lord of Glory has burst into our world in human flesh and blood, to make known His salvation. God’s plans and purposes encompass nothing less than the salvation of the whole world. John points to Jesus and says: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29, ESV) In our text, Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the Lord, who will bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And God has entrusted His church with the responsibility of making make His salvation known to a lost and dying world, as He empowers us by His Spirit to bring His light of life to the nations.

Our text today is sometimes referred to as the Great Commission of the Old Testament. It is just one of many places in which the Scriptures remind us that God wants to reveal His love, His grace and His salvation to the whole of lost and dying humanity. From the very foundation of the world, God had planned the salvation of all who would believe. It was never just about Adam and Eve, who were the first to receive the promise of a Saviour from sin. It was never just about Abraham, with whom God made His covenant. It was never just about Israel as the chosen people. God’s purpose is far greater than that. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord speaks to His Servant; to the only One who can live up to the call and expectation set forth in our text. This, of course, is the Eternal Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In His grace and mercy, the Lord of All reaches out to all, saying to His Servant: *“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.”*

How blessed we are, that God thinks big! We hear John say it again: *“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29, ESV) God’s plan doesn’t involve just a few people, but all people. Jesus comes to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom to the people of Israel, but He reaches out beyond the borders of Israel. He offers living water to a Samaritan woman of questionable reputation. He heals the servant of a Roman centurion—and commends the centurion for his faith! He casts a demon out of the daughter of a Canaanite woman and praises her faith, too. When the loving arms of Christ are outstretched on the cross, His love encompasses a dying thief. His love is there for all those who mock Him, even as He prays on the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* (Luke 23:34, ESV)

Yes, God thinks big. Our Saviour came to do more than lay a few bricks, to build a wall or even to build a cathedral. He came to build His church. He came to build His Kingdom. He came to glorify His Father and to be glorified by the Father. As the Father says: *I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.* What a joy it is

for us to know that His light, His salvation shines on us, too! Through His death and resurrection, Christ is God's gift of salvation for all the earth. He is the light of life for Jew, for Gentile, for all who believe in Him. His love includes you and your family. It includes your neighbours. It includes your cousin Bob and that person at the office that you think is a bit rude or selfish. It includes that driver who cut you off and who caused you to say something you should not have said. It includes people we don't think should be included, like the child abuser, the drug pusher or the political tyrant. God thinks big; so big that we are reminded: ***"[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."*** (1 Timothy 2:4, ESV) The Lord calls out to all and says: ***"As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"*** (Ezekiel 33:11, ESV)

God won't drag anyone kicking and screaming into heaven, but His plan, His desire is nothing less than the salvation of all mankind. He sends His light into all the world. The need for that light is as great as it ever was. There are many still lost in the darkness of sin and death. The turmoil and uncertainty of this world continually remind us of the terrible power of sin at work in the hearts of people everywhere. The struggles we see in our own lives remind us that we, too, are affected by sin's power over us. Only God's forgiveness brings light to the darkened heart. Thankfully, the Servant who is the life of all continues His light-giving ministry through His church. Peter reminds us: ***"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."*** (1 Peter 2:9, ESV) God calls to us and says, "Think big! Bring My light to the very ends of the earth." What an awesome responsibility God has given to us! Unfortunately, we tend to see this as an impossible goal. For most of us the idea of sharing our faith with the people around us seems overwhelming to us. How can even begin to think about making Jesus Christ and His salvation known to the whole world?

Today this congregation will gather for another call meeting. We will seek to extend a call to a pastor who will shepherd the Lord's flock in this place. Issuing that call is an awesome responsibility, and one of the most important things the congregation will ever do. As we undertake this blessed task, I urge you to think big. That doesn't mean that we think about our own plans, desires or even ideas of what would be best. Rather, we think of what God would have us do. We seek His guidance. Even though we may have our ideas of what is best for the church, we need to ask, "Lord, what would you have us do? What great things are You waiting to accomplish among us? We think big when we focus on what our great God can do and will do for His people. God knows the plans He has for us, and that plan includes the pastors He gives His church. Paul reminds us: ***"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."*** (Ephesians 4:11-13, ESV) That is what we need a pastor to do: to preach and teach God's Word in its truth and purity, to care for the flock and to prepare you, the people God loves so richly, for the works of service that seek to bring His light, led by His grace, to the very ends of the earth.

We also think big as we look at our work together as members of Lutheran Church-Canada. This weekend our congregation hosted our synod's national capital committee who are preparing our "Together One" effort. We are planning ways we can support the mission of the church with adequate financial resources for the future. You will be hearing more about this in the coming days, but we are thinking big about the work we do together.

Yes, we want to think big, but we also need to remember the wisdom God speaks through the psalmist: ***"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."*** (Psalm 127:1, ESV) God never asks His people for anything He has not first provided to us. He has blessed us as individuals with the gifts that we use together in His Church. We heard Paul tell us that in our Epistle lesson: ***"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 1:4-7, ESV) In His strength we are able to bring light to those around us. But God thinks bigger. He calls us together as congregations, that we may use the gifts He has given to us as individuals to build up one another and to reach out to the world around us. He calls us together as part of Lutheran Church-Canada because in our walking together, we are able to do more than we can alone. Working together, we are able to support mission work in our nation and throughout the world. Sharing together, we are able to think big. It is too small a thing to confine our efforts to Calgary, to Alberta or even to all of Canada. By the grace of God, empowered by His Spirit, we can think big and our great God will do great things to bring His light to the nations and His salvation to the ends of the earth. Amen.