

HOLY MONDAY 2025
Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church
Wilmington, Delaware
April 14, 2025

“I have given you as a covenant to the people” These words from the second prophet we know as Isaiah come as words of hope to a people in exile. They are the first of four “servant songs” found in Isaiah, and designated as such, are often interpreted as pointing to a leader within Israel, or perhaps a political leader (even Cyrus of Persia). Or some say they point to Christ who is yet to come.

I want to take a different approach. I do this because, like blame, looking for others to lead us in the way we desire is, I think, misleading. And to tell a bunch of folks hoping for relief that they’ll need to be patient and wait, oh, about five centuries, is, well, just cruel.

So, who is this servant? For the people of Judah, gathered in exile in the sixth century before the Common Era, it’s difficult to answer without saying, “Who? Me?” After all, they seem pretty much powerless and subject to the oppressive authority of political leaders.

Yet, that is who the prophet calls “God’s servant.” They are to be a “light to the nations,” “givers of sight to the blind,” to lead prisoners out of captivity, to lead those dwelling in darkness into light.

For us, it’s too easy to say that is about the people of Judah in exile, or even to say it’s about Christ. Hear those words “I have given you as a covenant to the people” as a phrase that follows our name—individually and collectively as a parish, or more to the point, as Christ’s Church.

Winston Churchill is quoted to have referred to the coming second World War as a “gathering darkness.” We, too, might interpret our own time as a gathering darkness as we witness the oppression of the poor and the alien in our land. That oppression will continue—with our consent, mind you—as long as we think that God’s covenant gift for all people is about someone else.

“I have given you, Immanuel Highlands, as a covenant to the people of Wilmington.” It’s who we are, in the name of the One who gives life to all that lives. To deny that name is to deny God’s glory among us.

So we continue to gather, to speak not only God’s praise, but God’s promise of deliverance from the death-dealing ways of our time. Not to say “there, there, it’ll get better” and walk away. Be the servant, which means to be the light of hope in a world of gathering darkness. Because even when it is its darkest, just one candle can diffuse a hopeful ray of light.

I often wonder if God’s purpose in the Judean exile was to show those who felt oppressed how to be that light. Maybe that’s why we’re where we are, too.