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## Lent 4 • Isaiah 42:14–21 • March 30, 2014

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**Lent 4 • Isaiah 42:14–21 • March 30, 2014****Introductory thoughts**

The final verse of the pericope governs our use of it and its context in chapter 42. The Lord takes pleasure (חפצ) —he gets a kick out of—placing his instruction, the script of the conversation he wishes to have with his human creatures (תורה), before them. He does so in accord with his righteousness. Preaching on this text will be framed by our need to be listening to the Lord and to be acknowledging and basking in his righteousness (קדוּתוֹ), his being the way he is, compassionate, merciful, fatherly.

**Context**

Whether we label the context of this text the entire Scripture, the entire book of Isaiah, or chapter 42, the context brings two words to bear on his hearers' hearts: words of threat and words of promise. Chapter 42 begins with the first of the songs of the servant, who as a bruised reed faithfully establishes righteousness among the peoples as he delivers the Lord's instruction (42:1–4). The Lord is the Creator who gives light to the blind and frees the prisoners (42:6–8), words paraphrased in Isaiah 61 and used by Jesus to identify himself and describe his own ministry (Lk 4:18). This leads to praise for God, whose might is displayed against his enemies (42:10–13). In this Sunday's text God expresses his anger, disgust, and hurt, all reactions to the unfaithfulness of his people, but he also renews his promise to deliver them, themes which continue in what follows the text.

**Notes on Text**

Verse 14: God puts up with a lot from his chosen people; his “longsuffering” denotes patience beyond normal endurance. But finally his love overcomes patience; God loses his temper with those whom he loves when they ignore his promise and his plan for their lives. That fits with his reminder that he is a jealous God (Ex 20:5) and does not want his people straying to other gods for their satisfaction in self-indulgence or their haven because of false fears. That jealousy is simply an element of his being Creator and loving his people. Their apostasy hurts so much that the Lord screams like a mother giving birth to a child.

Verse 15: God decides to move to save through tough love. His scream, like that of a woman in labor, not only echoes from the mountains; it destroys them. His breath, which gives life, in this case takes water away, the very stuff of life. He is serious about the failure of his human creatures to fear, love, and trust in him above all things! All this is indeed sign of his utter faithfulness. He is a lover par excellence. Restoring human creatures to his family gives him great delight and pleasure.

Verse 16: Just as the Lord promised light to the blind (42:6) and as the herald of the Lord's coming promised good traveling over smooth roads (40:3–4), so God promises to restore communication with the blind and deaf and to even out their paths. His conversation with them and his revelation for them comes from his “torah,” a gift of communication and sight which reflects who he is, his righteousness. His torah, or word, became flesh as the light of the world (Jn 1:1–14). The sermon can explore the

deliverance from sin within the context of blindness and light, deafness and word, in the fulfillment of Isaiah's promises in Christ.

The Old Testament confession of faith in the Creator defined the Lord's righteousness as faithfulness. Here God reiterates his promise to be faithful to his people. Martin Luther not only redefined human righteousness but also God's righteousness. God is being what God is according to his unchangeable nature when he is faithful; he is fair, but his grace and steadfast mercy always surround, consume, and enhance his fairness, to the relief—to the rescue and restoration—of sinners, whom he transforms into his children out of sheer fatherly goodness and mercy.

Verses 17–20: God's faithfulness means that he continues to call straying children to repentance. He calls us the way he sees us and does not hesitate to remind us when we have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to his torah. This text suggests that he has dramatic ways of doing so. Taking the air out of our personal balloons or our society's balloons is easy compared to destroying mountains and making rivers into islands.

### **Possible approach to a sermon on the text**

Mentioning sins besetting people in your congregation, call attention to the ways in which those sins hurt God and elicit his screams of anguish. Turn to the execution of his promise in Christ, the one who opens our ears to God's communication, his torah, and who opens our eyes to his concern for us, both in his anguish over our sins and in his love that delivers us from evil. Dwell on his pleasure over our repentance and trust in him.