

Good Friday Tenebrae – March 29, 2024

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin

Isaiah 53:2-6, 10 -- The Suffering, but Successful Servant

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. ⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

Dear fellow-believers, standing at the foot of the cross.

Our opening Scripture reading is a most beautiful Old Testament gospel proclamation. We find placed directly in the middle of the second part of Isaiah. There are 27 chapters from Isaiah 40-66. The whole structure of this section can be seen through the number three – three sections of nine chapters each and then each of those sets of nine chapters divides into sets of three. In the middle of all these triads are the verses which clearly prophesy Christ.

These verses bring us the fourth and final “servant song”. In Chapter 42 the **Lord introduces his Servant**. “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. He will bring justice to the nations.” (v.1, 2)

In chapter 49 the Lord **speaks of the Messiah's work in the world and his success**. “I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” (v.6b)

The third servant song **contrasts Israel's sins and the Servant's obedience**. In Chapter 50 these the Servant speaks: “Who will bring any charge against me?” (v. 8) and then says to disobedient Israel: “You will lie down in torment.” (v.11)

So we come to the final Servant song: **The Lord's Servant suffers for the Straying Sheep**.

During our Lenten services we have followed Jesus from the amazing reception on Palm Sunday through his appearances in Jerusalem on Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week to the Upper Room on Holy Thursday and to the garden and his arrest and illegal and unjust trials to the horrors of the cross.

Isaiah very specifically and with extreme accuracy prophesied those scenes from the passion history. Listen again to verse three: “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”

The uniformed bystander surely drew the conclusion that God was angry at the man in the middle. Isaiah wrote: “we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.” (v.4) He knew grief and was acquainted with suffering! But why? What had he done? In the third servant song the Promised One rightly claims his righteousness: “Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my

accuser? Let him confront me! (Is 50:8). The scene appears to be so confusing! He is innocent, but he is punished.

But God's plans stretch far beyond human thinking. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor. 1:18) The divine plan of salvation has the suffering Servant substitute for us. Isaiah writes in verse 10: "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer." **It was him for us and it worked!** Listen to the list of substitutionary expressions in verses 4-6:

- took up **our** infirmities
- carried **our** sorrows
- pierced for **our** transgressions
- crushed for **our** iniquities
- punishment that brought **us** peace was on him
- by his wounds **we** are healed
- laid on him the iniquity of **us** all.

Why did the Lord transfer our guilt on him and make him suffer? Isaiah tells us in verse 6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." This is the heart of the Gospel. This is grace – **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense! This is what brings such great solemnity to Holy Week and Good Friday. Here we see the cause of our eager expectation for Resurrection Day!

So this evening and every time we are confronted with our sinfulness, we can go to the foot of the cross and see with the great sorrow that it is my sins that sent Jesus to that torturous death.

The great 17th Century Dutch painter Rembrandt painted a five scene series of the life of Jesus. The first was of the nativity. The second was the still of the storm. In the third painting Rembrandt did what we each will find beneficial. He placed himself at the foot of the cross as it was being raised. This is one of his many self-portraits. The solemnity of Good Friday flows from our understanding and confession of our complete unworthiness to stand before God.

With extreme comfort Isaiah shows us that the Suffering Servant was successful. In the very first verse of this Servant Song we hear him say: "See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted." Yes dear friends the servant has been successful. He has carried out the Father's will. In verse ten the Lord says about his Servant that "he will see his offspring and prolong his days. And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand." The fourth of Rembrandt paintings in this series is the resurrection. We see the beauty and glory of the angel rolling the stone away. And in the final painting in this series the amazing ascension of Jesus reminds us that this is the promised result of the work of Christ. It was him for us! Some day we too will rise from the dead and ascend to the perfect peace and joy of heaven.

Good Friday again reminds us of The Suffering, but Successful Servant.

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