

**Preacher:** Pastor Twyla  
**Scripture:** Isaiah 50:4-9a

*The Master, God, has given me  
a well-taught tongue,  
So I know how to encourage tired people.  
He wakes me up in the morning,  
Wakes me up, opens my ears  
to listen as one ready to take orders.  
The Master, God, opened my ears,  
and I didn't go back to sleep,  
didn't pull the covers back over my head.  
I followed orders,  
stood there and took it while they beat me,  
held steady while they pulled out my beard,  
Didn't dodge their insults,  
faced them as they spit in my face.  
And the Master, God, stays right there and helps me,  
so I'm not disgraced.  
Therefore I set my face like flint,  
confident that I'll never regret this.  
My champion is right here.  
Let's take our stand together!  
Who dares bring suit against me?  
Let him try!  
Look! the Master, God, is right here.  
Who would dare call me guilty?  
Look! My accusers are a clothes bin of threadbare  
socks and shirts, fodder for moths!*

I have always pictured Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as a joyous, super-noisy event. We read in the scriptures that crowds had gathered along the street, wanting to see Jesus. The people knew him as a teacher and healer. In fact, before arriving in Jerusalem, he raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, after being dead for four days already. I can only imagine the buzz in the community after that happened. So, word about Jesus had gotten around and all the Jews wanted to see him.

Hopes were high that he might be the promised Messiah who would come and save them from their oppression. We can sense the excitement and anticipation in the air. Was he the One who would win them their freedom. So, the people who lined the streets shouted, "Hosanna" which means "save us," "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna!"

Indeed, Jesus was the Messiah; and he did come to save them, but not in the manner they were seeking. They firmly believed that the Messiah would be a strong and glorious earthly king who would deliver them from their Roman oppressors and form once again a great and independent Jewish kingdom. This is not the plan God had for Jesus.

The reading from Isaiah that you heard this morning, is considered a messianic prophecy, and it paints a different picture of the promised Messiah. Isaiah describes the promised one as one who would be abused, scoffed at and one who would suffer physically. The people would

have seen this kind of ill-treatment appropriate only for someone deserving of punishment for sin, not for their Messiah.

Jesus knew the scriptures from Isaiah. We find him quoting from the prophet's words. He knew he was the suffering servant in the prophecy. Because of this he knew how his journey would end. The Jews would not understand the real meaning of Isaiah's words, but Christians do know after having heard the rest of the story. We know that Jesus' road to suffering and sacrifice was a price he paid for our freedom from sin. He came for spiritual freedom, not physical, economic or political freedom.

I've often wondered what Jesus was thinking and feeling that day. While fully divine, he was also human. Surely, he had feelings that we would understand. He knew he would need to die, and who of us would not fight that. He knew the shouts of the people were superficial, and soon their cries would be of a different nature. I imagine the temptation to save oneself was strong, even in him. We know he was tempted before. We know that prior to his arrest, he prayed to his Father, that this cup would pass over him, so we know evil tried to dissuade him.

One might wonder whether he could have given into their praises and desires, and been the kind of Messiah they sought. If he had done that, he would not have endured the pain and suffering, and even death that he was facing. But Jesus stayed focused on God's plan. He had scriptures to hold him up, keeping his concentration on taking the higher road, the road of integrity, despite any feelings that may have been tormenting him.

Jesus was confident of the ultimate outcome because God, his Father, had whispered in his ear, the promise of something better. Jesus remained faithful to God and God's plan. Our salvation hinged on his faithfulness. It's not what we do or what we know that saves us from our sin and puts us right with God. It's what Jesus did.

Jesus, once again, sets a good example for us in how we should deal with our own personal suffering. The abusive words and insults, the discomfort of physical or material or economic suffering can weigh heavy, leading us to an emotional or spiritual breaking point. We might look for easy outs and if found, we may be tempted to take advantage of them, selling our souls and our integrity for a quick fix, which may pan out to be a temporary fix; or cause some kind of harm, physical, emotional, spiritual impairment to another.

The key to suffering without selling our souls is not found in the acceptable, nonbiblical, worldly escapisms, manipulation or power. Those voices can get very loud, and they can sound pretty attractive. Who of us enduring challenges and suffering begs for more? No, we want it to go away, sooner than later, so these worldly offers tempt us.

But Jesus shows us that there is a powerful, mighty strength that can be had, to those who will listen to the whispers of God. It's not that God doesn't want us to hear his words of encouragement and direction, and so he whispers. I think it has everything to do with what we want to hear, perhaps that being the easier more comfortable solutions the world's wisdom offers us, lest we forget the greater prize of God's presence and the promise of resurrection into newness of life, if not in the immediate time, then in the greater scheme of eternal time.

It is also key for us to also note that even as Jesus suffered, he did not think of himself. He cared for the needs of others, even as he looked down from the cross at those jeering at him and the others gathered there, he asked God to forgive them. This is a powerful witness of one who is clearly in touch with God. In this we find that Jesus' example offers us encouragement, to be faithful, to hold on to our spiritual integrity not only for our own sakes, but to offer others hope as we point them to Jesus.

We enjoy hearing the festive Palm Sunday story, but we all know the story does not end here. Things get devastatingly rough for Jesus. He endures an unimaginable suffering on the

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cross and death. But let us not lose hope, because Sunday is coming, not just any Sunday, but resurrection Sunday. If pain and suffering is a part of your daily experience right now, or when it comes your way, think of Jesus, remember his journey, particularly through the days we know as holy week.

Be encouraged by his handling of those days, and listen intently for the whispers of God in your own ear, your mind, your spirit, grab a hold of the direction his whispers give you, and know that resurrection is promised for you just as it was for Jesus. Don't sell your soul for anything less; because anything less is really an **eternity** of more suffering. Amen.