

Jesu Juva

“The Servant Suffers For You”

Text: Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12 (with Fourth Passion Reading)

Last week, we heard that God’s Servant would suffer opposition and abuse. This week, Isaiah spells it out in all its gory detail. This Servant Song, heard every year on Good Friday evening, is the best known of the Servant Songs, telling us in terms that could not be more clear, that the Lord’s Servant is a *Suffering* Servant.

His appearance was marred beyond human semblance, Isaiah said. Or in other words, He didn’t even look human after all that was done to Him. If His body had been dumped in a field and stumbled upon by someone, he wouldn’t know if these remains were human or animal. He was ***pierced***. He was ***crushed***. He was ***stricken***, flogged ruthlessly. He was ***despised, rejected***. Traded for a criminal named Barabbas. And then hung up on a cross between heaven and earth, belonging to neither. Rejected by men, forsaken by God.

Unbelievable. That’s what Isaiah says. ***Who has believed what he has heard from us?*** Who could believe *this*?

Pontius Pilate certainly couldn’t. He couldn’t figure out what was going on. He couldn’t figure out why the Jews would want Jesus dead so badly. And He couldn’t figure out why Jesus didn’t defend Himself. Or as Isaiah put it: ***He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.***

This frightens Pilate. That he couldn’t figure it out. And the silence. For when faced with crucifixion, prisoners, criminals, plead for their life; plead for anything but crucifixion, the most ruthless, painful, humiliating, excruciating death invented. But Jesus does not. And the silence is deafening.

So Pilate probes, he questions, he investigates, but he gets nothing. And so **four times** we heard from the lips of Pilate tonight that Jesus is *not guilty*. The official record of the Roman court of Pontius Pilate is - four times! - that Jesus is *not guilty*.

And Pilate got it right. Jesus has indeed done nothing to deserve death. Not only has He broken no *Roman* laws, He hasn’t broken *any* laws. He is completely and utterly sinless. In no way does death have any claim on Him. If *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23), those are wages Jesus *does not owe* and *does not have to pay*.

But pay them He does. **For you.**

And that's what Isaiah speaks of in this Servant Song, even more than the suffering. He tell us the reason for it: that He does all this **for you**.

Those *griefs He bore* and those *sorrows He carried*? Yours.

Those *transgression He was pierced* for and those *iniquities that crushed Him*? Yours again.

And this, Isaiah says, is no accident. *It is the Lord's will to crush Him*. It is the Lord's will *to put Him to grief*. It is the Lord's will to *make His soul an offering for guilt*. Your guilt.

And the result? Isaiah is clear about that too. Upon Him was the *chastisement that brought us . . . peace*. With His *wounds we are . . . healed*. And He will make we - *who like sheep have gone astray, and have turned - every one - to his own way* - He will make *many to be accounted . . . righteous*. Not just let off the hook. Not just get out of jail free. But *counted righteous*. The official record of the court for you: *not guilty*. And that not a miscarriage of justice, but the justice of God. The not guilty one become guilty, and the guilty one become not guilty. The one who owes nothing pays everything, so that you who owe a debt greater than you could ever pay, now owe nothing.

That was the will of the Lord, and so the Servant's will as well.

But then Isaiah says something unexpected in this context: that after the Lord has crushed Him, after He has put Him to grief, after His soul is made an offering for the sin and guilt of the world . . . *He shall see his offspring; He shall prolong his days*. Or in other words, that is not the end of the Servant; the Servant will not stay dead. His days shall continue and be *prolonged*. And *He will see His offspring*. He will see those who become children of God because of His death and resurrection. This suffering - as horrible as it is - will end in triumph.

Isaiah will spell out that triumph a bit more next week, in the last Servant Song. But imagine how surprising these words must have sounded to the people then. We have heard these words many times and know the end of the story. But when Isaiah first spoke these words and penned these words, what hope they must have inspired; what joy they must have caused in days that were pretty bleak and dark.

But so too for you, in your bleak and dark days. Whatever you are going through, Jesus knows it. However deep the darkness, Jesus has been there. And as He entered it for you and came through it for you, so He will bring you through it with Him. And so we will sing at the close of the service tonight:

*Here we have a firm foundation, Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation, Is the name of which we boast;*

*Lamb of God, for sinners wounded, Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded Who on Him their hope have built (LSB #451 v. 4).*

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.