

No Looking Back

To begin this sermon, let us say we make up a story of a factitious hero who is going into a small town to save it from some Mafioso gang that is bullying the town and robbing it through a protection racket till the people have no more money.

Our hero comes into town alone. No one will go with him to help the town; he is dealing with corrupt officials on the take at the state level or local level. He is coming into town and the gang knows that he is coming. He drives a beat up, old, rusted-out Chevy sedan, not much of an impression. The townsfolk are happy to see him, but they are too chicken to support him. When the bad guys come out of the bar into the street to meet our hero, the town folk disappear into their houses and lock the doors and draw the blinds.

You can imagine this story with a Clint Eastwood hero with guns blazing, or an attorney with the only weapon he has is a briefcase full of indictments and law books. Either way the town is asking itself as we are asking ourselves.

- Who is this guy?
- Why is he doing this?
- What do you think he is feeling as he pulls into town with all eyes upon him?

Palm Sunday marked the beginning of the holiest week of the Church year, the week we commemorate Christ's passion and death and resurrection for us and our salvation. Yesterday we saw Jesus pulling into town. Some of the people are glad to see him, others are concerned he comes to mess up their comfortable life situation. The former cheer him on, "Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!"

But who is this fellow Jesus anyway? What kind of king is He? What does He come to do? He comes in on a donkey. Why? He doesn't end this triumphal entry by ascending a golden throne, to live and reign as the mighty ruler of some spectacular earthly kingdom. He has come to die. Jesus has not come to be served, but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many.

Isaiah, our Old Testament passage, is bringing out who this guy is. The Father's humble Servant is on a mission. And that mission is to be abused. So lowly He comes;

obedient He comes; humble He comes, with His face set for the cross. He is our servant king, trusting His Father will deliver Him from His foes. Who is Jesus? He is the Father's servant come to do the Father's will. He is heading to the cross via the crowds cheering Him on. There is no turning back now for Him now.

Verse 5: This servant has consigned himself to obey the master, which is God. / Jesus said in the gospels that His food was to do the will of Him who sent Him.

Verse 6: The Servant obeys God, but his obedience comes at a price. He must stand up to his adversaries in a great contest. For his obedience, his back will be beaten, his beard pulled, he will be spat upon and disgraced. /

Jesus knows the He will get suffering and the outrageous abuse that will befall Him in His impending crucifixion. He prays in Gethsemane that if possible, this cup of suffering may be removed. In fact, he prays it again, but the second time He prays, "Let God's will be done." Why does He do it? He must die, that is why He came. He submits to the suffering in willing obedience to God.

Verse 7: The servant's confidence is in the help of God, therefore He sets His face to weather the abuse heaped upon him. / This is the picture of Jesus in the courtroom and in Pilot's chambers.

Verse 8: The servant knows that the one who will vindicate Him is always near. The servant knows that those who contend with Him are not contending with Him but with God himself, therefore He stays silence and lets the folly of the persecutor come to nothing. /

Jesus faces the adversary confidently for He is without guilt in a courtroom of sinners. He is condemned but this too is the will of God, for He takes our place to die for our rebellion. This must have been an interesting thought process; Jesus was dying for the sins of the people who were right there falsely convicting Him of the crime.

So we ask the questions again:

- Who is He?
 - Who is that person that is being beat, spit upon, and mocked?
 - The bloodied one is God's own servant
- Why did He come?
 - He willingly bears it all.

- Even death and the suffering that leads up to it on the cross.
- To suffer condemnation we deserve, taking the sin of the world.
- To make us righteous. It is through faith in His sacrifice for us, we have become justified and have paradise.
- And so we will rise. Even as on Easter Christ rose for us.
- What do you think He is thinking as the crowds cheer Him on that Sunday before Easter and what do you think He is thinking as the crowds jeer him in Pilot's palace on Friday? He is thinking the same thing at both places. He had a job to do. There was no looking back.

What do we understand now about this Jesus? What should we be thinking and meditating about this Holy Week?

- Person?
- His mission?
- What should we be thinking about this Holy Week?

Peter followed along at a distance the route of the temple soldiers who took Jesus to the Jewish Sanhedrin court room that first Good Friday. And from this experience he relates in our epistle.

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.¹

Let us do likewise this special week from tonight to Friday; once again follow our chief servant, as loyal servants of Jesus, remembering He, as servant/king, went to the cross for you.

Our church has the Stations of the Cross attached to our walls. This would be an excellent way to follow the servant-king through this Holy Week. Each station of the cross gives us time to meditate on His journey. The first station applies especially to what I have preached tonight. "Jesus, after having been scourged and crowned with thorns was unjustly condemned by Pilot to die on the cross."

¹ 1 Peter 2:21-23.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²

Holy Week Monday

Isaiah 50:5-10; 1 Peter 2:21-24; John 12:1-36

April 15, 2019

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² 1 Peter 2:24.