

Good Friday / March 29, 2024

Isaiah 53:12

“He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Behold My Servant

Jesus was God’s servant, prophesied by Isaiah, announced by the angel to His mother, testified to by the Holy Spirit and the Divine Voice at His baptism. Jesus spoke of Himself as a servant. He told the disciples He had not come to be served, but to serve. He showed His servanthood by washing each of their feet Holy Thursday, as they celebrated the sacred meal of the Covenant and He instituted the sacred meal of the New Covenant in His blood. His service would be expressed fully on the cross, where He bore the sins of the world and gave Himself as a ransom for many.

God created Israel to be His servant to make His name known in the world and to make Him known as the only God. In this way the promise to Abraham would be fulfilled and all nations would be blessed with the knowledge of the Lord. Israel failed in their service. Instead of making the Lord known as the only God and worshipping Him alone, Israel worshipped the gods of the nations. Instead of making His salvation known in all the earth, Israel buried the knowledge of the Lord under the mountain of their sin. Yet, the Lord is the faithful God. He promised to send a special servant, born of the people of Israel, who would fulfill Israel’s purpose. He would gather the tribes of Israel and all nations to Himself, to walk in the light of the knowledge of the Lord and His salvation.

Jesus claimed the words of Isaiah and role of servant at the beginning of His public ministry. He called Israel to repentance, forgave sins and healed people of the ailments of body and spirit. Isaiah said the servant would open the eyes of the blind. In the gospel of John, Jesus opened the eyes of a man blind from birth. Most importantly Jesus gave sight to the spiritually blind, so we may see Him as the Light of the world, our God and only Saviour. In His childhood synagogue Jesus read from Isaiah saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the season of the Lord’s favour.” He closed the scroll and said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” On Good Friday long ago, Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah promising the servant and all the scriptures that promised Him as our Saviour. Behold! My servant!

Jesus was a common name in first century Israel. Derived from the name Joshua, it means “The Lord saves.” It expressed Israel’s hope for the Lord’s salvation, mainly from the Romans. Many people had come claiming to be the Saviour, the Messiah. People wondered if this Jesus might be the Christ, the Messiah, the long-awaited Saviour of Israel. They were correct, although their expectations were misguided. The salvation He brought was not from Roman rule, but from sin, death and the devil. Sadly, this kept them from recognizing this Jesus as the Messiah. From prison John the Baptizer, who had seen the Spirit anoint Him and heard the Father declare Him His Son, sent disciples to ask ‘are you really the One or should we expect someone else?’ Jesus answered in accordance with the words of Isaiah promising the servant. He said, “Tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news preached to them.” Behold! My Servant.

Jesus showed Himself the servant by calling people to faith in Him as their God and Saviour. The Lord gave Jesus the tongue of those who are taught. His words sustained the weary, healed injury and created faith in the hearts of those who listened. His words liberated those oppressed in body and spirit. When Jesus spoke creation responded, evil spirits fled. When Jesus spoke people listened and those who listened with faith were set free in body and spirit. Jesus’ words opened hearts to receive faith, forgiveness and life. The disciples didn’t fully understand Jesus until after He rose from the dead and opened their minds to understand the scriptures. But even with their limited understanding when Jesus called, they listened, dropped everything and followed Him. When others abandoned Him because His words were too hard for them, they refused to stop following Him. They said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” In Jesus they saw the Lord’s servant.

Jesus has the words of eternal life. He calls us out of the darkness of life in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death, to live in His light. He is the source of life in time and eternity. He calls us to follow Him in faith. He gives His Spirit to lead us. He promises blessing in time; forgiveness of sin, support in hardship, His presence among us. He promises life in eternity. Isaiah sang, "Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord." Jesus calls us out of the darkness of sin and the futility of life, in which everything ends in death, to trust Him as our God and Saviour. Behold my servant.

As the Lord's servant, Jesus was chosen and chose, to suffer for our sins and die for our forgiveness. Jesus told the disciples plainly that He must go to Jerusalem, be mistreated by the religious authorities, suffer, die and rise. It was a nasty surprise to the disciples, but it was no surprise to Him. It was for this purpose that He had come into the world. Isaiah sang of the servant saying, it was God's will to crush Him. God gave Him to suffer the penalty for human sin. Jesus gave Himself freely, out of obedience to the Father and love for human beings, to pay the debt of our sin through His suffering and death on the cross.

Good Friday is a sombre day. Yet, the sadness of Good Friday is not the sacrifice of Christ, it is the sin of the world that made this sacrifice necessary. As He was paraded out of the city to the cross, Jesus encountered the women of Jerusalem, weeping for Him. They were among the faithful who had welcomed into the city the previous Sunday. However, He told them not to weep for Him, but to weep for themselves and their children. We weep because of our sin and sinfulness. We rejoice in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. He is God's servant, who through His sinless life and sacrificial death ransomed us from bondage to sin, the control of the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. He is the Lord's servant for our salvation.

Isaiah sang, "He poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors." Jesus numbered Himself with the transgressors when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary. Holy God from eternity, Jesus joined himself to our humanity, to live as one with us in this world in bondage to sin, under the dominion of evil and the condemnation of death. He poured Himself out to become one with us. He poured Himself out for the sake of His love for us. Jesus joined Himself to our humanity, so that He would offer His sinless humanity in place of our sinful humanity on the cross to intercede for our sins. He was numbered with the transgressors so He would bear our sins, take our place in their penalty and bring forgiveness and healing in relation to His Father for all who receive Him.

When Jesus died the earth shook and many of the righteous dead arose. He had taken away the power of death, which is sin. When Jesus died the curtain of the temple, which separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple, was torn in two, from top to bottom. Jesus' death paid the debt of human sin. The Father accepted His sacrifice, the barrier that separated humans, even believers from His presence, was taken away. In Christ and through His sacrifice, we have access to God in peace. That's why this day is called 'good.' On the cross Jesus died to pardon and sanctify you and me!

Jesus made intercession for us sinners on the cross. Jesus continues to make intercession for us through the forgiveness of sin given in our baptism, promised freely and fully whenever and as often as we turn to Him in repentance. He calls us to Himself in faith that He might forgive our sins, give us strength in our weakness, courage in our fears and the promise of life in the shadow of death. Behold the servant of the Lord! The servant who came to seek and to save the lost. The servant who gave Himself as a ransom for many. The servant who gave Himself for our salvation. Jesus our Saviour! In His Name. Amen.