

Palm Sunday
Year C

Luke 19:28-40
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 22:14 - 23:56

As I read the various lessons for today, I began to consider one direction for this sermon, but ended up going in a direction that I had never seen before. Obviously, God has a message we need to hear and, therefore, I am forging out into something new.

The passage we heard this morning from Isaiah is one of the Suffering Servant songs. Normally, as we read this passage, we focus on the description of the suffering and equate that to the suffering Jesus experienced during the crucifixion. But, is that the only message in this passage? Is there another reason to examine this?

As we look closely at this portion of scripture, we see a person called by God to be a teacher. Not only does he have this calling, but God gives him the message to proclaim - to sustain the weary. This is not a one shot call, but is repeated morning after morning. Perhaps this is God's way of making sure the teacher gets the message. Two aspects of this teaching become evident quickly; we can learn by listening to our students and to our own weariness, which comes as a gift from God, giving us the experience to help others. Because of our experience, we are able to honestly say, "Been there, done that."

Even as we acknowledge that our calling is from God, there are risks in teaching what we hear from God. Not everyone will accept our message and some will oppose us violently. God promises to be with us, to comfort us through these challenges. Because we know the origins of our message, we can take comfort in the fact that God will be with us to sustain us. We are not on our own, but, as we read in verse 7, "The Lord God helps me." There is no disgrace in having opposition to our teaching. God is with us to sustain us and to vindicate us. That is our hope.

Will people challenge our teaching? Yes, even as they challenged Jesus. Will they drag us before judges? Probably, though not always through the court system. Will we stand alone? No, God will be with us through it all as our defender. Why, therefore, do we worry and why do we focus on the negative?

Isaiah points out that the same God who calls us to spread the message of love and acceptance is the same God who will stand by us when the going gets tough. Yes, Jesus cried out from the cross, asking if God had forsaken Him. But, Jesus also cried out to God from the cross, "Into Your hands I commend My Spirit." Jesus did not feel abandoned on the cross and we should never feel that God has abandoned us. "It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?"