

**Isaiah 53:4-12**

53:4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

53:8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.

53:9 They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

53:10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

53:11 Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

53:12 Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

**Mark 10:35-45**

10:35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

10:36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

10:37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

10:38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

10:39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;

10:40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

10:41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

10:42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

10:43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

10:44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

10:45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

King Hussein of Jordan ruled for over 50 years until his death in 1999. Now I am not saying all his decisions were the best. History can judge that. But his leadership in the Middle East, had an impact on his nation and neighboring countries. He was a noble leader.

Kenneth Bailey relates a story about King Hussein in his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*. One night in the early 1980's, the king was informed by his security police that a group of about seventy-five Jordanian army officers were at that very moment meeting in a nearby barracks plotting a military overthrow of the kingdom. The security officers requested permission to surround the barracks and arrest the plotters. After a somber pause the king refused and said, "Bring me a small helicopter." A helicopter was brought. The king climbed in [and] with the pilot and himself flew to the barracks and landed on the roof. The king told the pilot, "If you hear gun shots, fly away at once without me." Unarmed, the king then walked down two flights of stairs and suddenly appeared in the room where the plotters were meeting and quietly said to them: Gentlemen, it has come to my attention that you are meeting here tonight to finalize your plans to overthrow the government, take over the country and install a military dictator. If you do this, the army will break apart and the country will be plunged into civil war. Tens of thousands of innocent people will die. There is no need for this. Here I am! Kill me and proceed. That way, only one man will die. After a moment of stunned silence, the rebels as one, rushed forward to kiss the king's hand and feet and pledge loyalty to him.

Kenneth Bailey comments, "King Hussein opted for total vulnerability. He acted nobly and by so doing he fanned into flame the dying embers of the rebels' sense of honor."

A great leader is a servant first. Seeking the welfare of his people first, King Hussein showed courage in the face of evil. Such servant leadership can transform reality and lead to new possibility, in this case, the possibility of peace. In this act King Hussein led in vulnerability and love for his people over self.

Today's passage reveals the true nature of the disciples, James and John, when they request to sit at King Jesus' right and left hands. They want to be the top dogs of Jesus' administration. I just love these guys. They are so authentically human. You see, Jesus has just predicted his passion and death for the third time. It seems they are not hearing Jesus. He has just said,

"See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; <sup>34</sup> they

will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”  
(Mark 10:33-34)

Immediately James and John ask to be advisors in his cabinet. Perhaps it shows their extreme dedication and willingness to suffer. Perhaps they intend to share in his suffering by hanging on the crosses on either side. They seem sure. When Jesus asks if they are willing to share in the cup he drinks and his baptism meaning death. "Of course!" They say. "We are with you. We are all in."

So perhaps they are truly brave, but more likely they are scared to death. When we are afraid, our first thought is our security. James and John seem to be securing their place and position. Pick us first, Jesus, they are thinking. Like picking teams. They are trying to be in the right place. Rather than power hungry, they may just be scared. Mark 10:32 reads,

*<sup>32</sup> They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.*

Then Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection. They are probably scared out of their wits. When we live in fear, our first thought is security. Scared people do interesting things. Whether the person is a scared parent trying to ensure his or her child is in the right social groups or the adult who wants to be in the right supper club. In fear we batten down the hatches, tighten up the ship, garner control. James and John preemptively try to secure a position for themselves. The need for security and fear drives us to do things. We live in an insecure time with the threat of terrorism close at hand. In fear citizens are monitored for safety, and we seek security at all cost. Fear and security are very human experiences.

Jesus is describing a different way, a new way of life. He is calling you and me into this way of life.

He tells them that he will pour out his life in courage, vulnerability, and love. He will pay out his life in sacrifice like a ransom. Rather than fear and security, Jesus shows faith and servant hood.

He reminds us that the way forward is found in serving. Serving itself is a means of God's grace. Not a way to be saved, but a response to Jesus' life poured out, the final sacrifice, that leads us into a way of life that is directed towards the Kingdom of God.

But that is not how the world works, you may be thinking. That's true. To lay down our lives, our fears, our anger, seeking to serve the will of God and one another is counter intuitive, and counter-cultural. The last is first, the first is last in the Kingdom. But Jesus says it is the way to new life. Dying to self and fear leads to freedom and peace in way unimaginable. Just in the way that King Hussein faced fear with his own vulnerable life. His act of great love and service, led to new life and peace.

**Do you long for new life and the peace that passes understanding?**

## **Serve and seek the kingdom of God.**

As some of us have the privilege of going to El Faro in Guatemala to serve this week, I am reminded of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, 20th century, physician, theologian, and organist who spent his life serving as a medical missionary in Goban, Africa. In college I read his book, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* in which he wrote:

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Hap Carr reminded me after the first service, that the Scroll of Honor at Clemson University asks reflection questions as one walks the park, the final and most important, "Who will you serve?"

One person who did this was Francis of Assisi, who almost died of an illness, when he heard a Christ's call "Francis, go, rebuild my Church." He left behind his inheritance and home to do so. We are called to be Christ's church in this place so in closing, I invite you to recommit to serving Christ and his kingdom as you pray with me the servant's prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis:

### **The Prayer of Saint Francis<sup>i</sup>**

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek To be consoled as to console, To be understood as to understand, To be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

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<sup>i</sup> Attributed to Francis Bernadone, perhaps the most universally loved of Christian saints, who was born in Assisi, Italy, in 1181 or 1182. At the age of twenty two, after a sudden illness that brought him almost to the point of death, he left his home and inheritance to follow an injunction that he felt he received from Christ himself: "Francis, go and rebuild my Church." Three great Franciscan orders quickly grew around the monks, nuns, and lay disciples who responded to his joyful example of universal love and selfless service.