

Isaiah 50:4–6

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

Philippians 2:5–7

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Matthew 21:9; 27:22ff (abbreviated)

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

“Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” ...And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Intro Question

What have you lost and what have you gained in the imposed self-quarantine? What is the “shelter-in-place” order doing to and for you? What is God doing?

Background

The poetry of Isaiah 50, while not ambivalent, does starkly differentiate between how the Servant of the LORD communes with God and conversely how he is treated by others. Hinging at, “...I was not rebellious; I turned not backward,” the servant goes from telling how he, like his God, encourages with a word to then describing how he does not turn from assault and violent shame. The servant is later described as setting his face like flint—he is faithful and determined. Which begs the question: what is his mission?

Discuss:

1. The Peculiar Parade

The story of Passion Week told by Matthew shows clear cases of ambivalence. Pilate knows that the religious leaders are jealous of Jesus. He tries to call their bluff regarding his execution by giving them a way out, asking who they would want freed. In addition, Jesus himself seems to sense some ambivalence in the disciples who he sends on the errand for the donkey and thereby reassures them of their duty. He sends them with a reaffirming script, “The Lord has need of it.” Maybe most poignantly, ambivalence comes for the reader of the story in this: Jesus on the donkey. You want to ask Jesus if he knew how silly this would look. “You’ll have two donkeys and you’ll be riding the smaller of the two? Your feet dragging and all?!” He knows. Jesus’ self-awareness does not end at image management, optics, or gaudy power antics.

He used what was foolish in the world to shame the wise. If the disciples thought he was leading a military revolution, there’s nothing more weak, foolish, and impotent than leading a crowd of the poor, abandoned, aged, and handicapped into the power-flexing city of Jerusalem under Roman rule, on a baby ass! It’s strange watching Jesus’ plan unfold. He’ll not be boxed in. Why does he identify so embarrassingly with the powerless and forsaken? Jesus exposed himself to the ridicule of it all. Why?

The crowd at the triumphal entry is a strange one. Only to be outdone by the guy who has brought them. Jesus is who he is. More than not being boxed in, he will not be ignored. He incites a visceral reaction from all. He knows our needs. “The Lord has need of them.” Those who have had everything taken from them—the destitute—in addition to those with privilege, all must cry their confession of him.

2. The Unimaginable Cry

The members of the crowd are left ambiguous. Matthew invites us to imagine those and ourselves who would cry “Hosanna!” and/or “Let him be crucified.” In just five days the city is overturned everyone cries out one way or another. Remember that Peter said that he would stay loyal through it all, denied three times, and wept at the rooster’s call. Judas is another character whose cry we can see.

We also have the scene on the cross, where Jesus speaks to the two men with whom he’s crucified. One says, “Remember me.” To which Jesus responds, “Today you’ll be with me in paradise.” Why does Barabbas get to go free, why can Jesus assure the crucified man that he’ll be with him? What cry gets the final word?

Wonder of wonders: Jesus is forsaken. Jesus sustains with a word all who are weary. He cries his prayer, sings his anguish: “My God, My God, why am I forsaken?” He gave his back to those who strike. The most unjust execution in history. How could God let that happen? For you. Jesus absorbed the penalty, power, and reign of death with cries and tears because of his Father’s love for you. He only does what he sees the Father doing. The case is settled. You’re adopted by the blood.

Questions and Prayer

1. How are you ambivalent toward Jesus? Does seeing the justice and love of God make you ambivalent?
2. When has your fear of abandonment kept you from trusting God?

Father...In Christ, you welcome us. Thank you. Show us love in Jesus blood. Amen