

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 370, 04-05-2020 † Palm Sunday

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

ISAIAH 50

⁴The LORD God gave me a tongue like the learned, an instructed tongue, so I know how to sustain the weary with a word. He wakes me up morning by morning. He wakes up my ears so that I listen like the learned. ⁵The LORD God opened my ear, and I myself was not rebellious. I did not turn back. ⁶I submitted my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from disgrace and from spit. ⁷The LORD God will help me, so I will not be disgraced. Therefore I have made my face hard like flint. I know that I will not be put to shame. ⁸The one who will acquit me is near! Who can accuse me? Let us take our stand. Who can pass judgment on me? Let him approach me. ⁹Look, the LORD God will help me. Who then can declare me guilty?



Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Know what that means? It is a call to save. “Save us! Save us in the highest!” What do you mean when you say that?

The Holy God chose to be among His people. Palm Sunday gives us a stunning, upbeat portrait of triumphant Jesus riding into Jerusalem. The crowd cheered and applauded Him.

Yet while singing “Hosanna!” do we really want His kind of salvation? Do we really want to go down that road? Or would we rather social-distance from a holy God? Our text seems a far cry from that joyful scene, yet here is a real King, the Servant who came to save us by suffering and dying on the cross in our place.

THE SERVANT PRACTICES SOCIAL CLOSENESS

1. Close to people

There are four famous servant songs of Isaiah; this is the third servant song of Isaiah. There is a definite switch from the sins of disobedient people to the suffering Servant of God. This is the Messiah, and Lord would soon lay on Him the iniquities of us all.

Singing messianic songs sounded so right to the people. It was evident that Jesus taught with authority. He was anointed with the Spirit and with power. He was there to preach good news.

God the Father gave Jesus Christ an instructive tongue, especially for the weary. Jesus always had the right words for the right time. He was hard on the proud and unbelieving. But He was gentle to the fatigued. His words were life-giving. They set people free. His words bound up the broken-hearted. He comforted the mourning. His words brought to life.

But this Jesus wasn't always the Messiah King they wanted. They would have preferred a social distance from this holy Son of God. He came too close to their sinful attitudes and misguided ideas. They wouldn't like that. They wouldn't like Him. They would have His back scourged with whips. They would strike His cheeks with their fists. They were not going to be gentlemen about this fight, as the writer mentions plucking out the Messiah's beard and spitting in His face. They would shout, "*He trusts in God. Let God rescue Him now, if He wants Him, because He said, 'I am the Son of God'*" (Matt. 27:43). This Servant of the Lord, this Christ, was subject to utter contempt.

It should not be this way. Social closeness, when we get to have it, should not mean brutality and contempt. "*Punishments are prepared for scoffers and beatings for the backs of fools,*" says the Proverb (19:29). But you may forget, this was a holy Son of God brought close to sinners. We should have known that sooner or later sinners were going to be contemptuous and brutal, when they can, to their God.

So it is with all sinners. Not a few times have I felt contemptuous for God when He has told me what's right and what's wrong. Not a small number are my feelings of frustration when He isn't making this covid pandemic disappear. Maybe you can relate? Meanwhile God may have used this quarantine-disease thing to curb some of our bad habits. We might have been up to no good anyway! In our sin, we may have preferred God remained at a distance to begin with. And in our sin, we are no better than the scoundrels who praised the Christ once with palms, then treated Him with contempt and brutality the same week.

But while this Christ wasn't always the Savior we wanted, He has always been the Savior we needed. That is because He was also ...

2. Close to God

In all sincerity, this Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, this Christ, went against all human instinct for survival. Unlike Jonah, Moses, even Elijah and Jeremiah, this Servant of the Lord did not shrink back from His task. He had no spirit of rebellion. (This is one reason we can be sure He was not just a man, but also true God.)

The Servant set His face hard as flint. He knew the Lord helps Him, therefore He would be determined and resolute. He maintained meekness and lacked vengeance. He would have a certain majestic control over the situation. On Palm Sunday Jesus could read their hearts and know the fickleness of the crowd and their fleeting emotions. Yet He accepted their praise and their accolades, their cheers and their shouts.

This could be true because He was always in close connection with the Father. Morning after morning Jesus would wake up to serve the Father and to learn from Him. Morning after morning He would learn of the plan and the time to set salvation in motion. The One who would acquit Him would always be near.

And the Father would indeed acquit the Son. No, I don't mean in the puppet trial that the Jews used to put on a show against the Christ, with all the lying witnesses and mixed-up testimony. I don't mean the Protagorean, existentialist meanderings of Pilate as a bumbling judge caught between crowd and King. That was shameful enough and difficult to bear, as it is when any innocent man is sentenced to death, let alone the only-begotten Son.

What the Servant of the Lord appeals to in Isaiah 50 is not the courts of men, but the tribunal of heaven. After all was said and done, suffering, cross, and tomb, the Father would examine the case of Christ in heaven and the charges would come up wanting. Who could accuse the Son of God? He only wished to be close to us, but was innocently put to death. Being close to us would take more than palm branches and the blueprints of friendship. It would take eradicating sin. It would mean making peace between the Father and us, and bringing these two parties together in reconciliation – God and sinner.

The suffering Servant would earn the right to taunt: "*Who can accuse me? Let us take our stand. Who can pass judgment on me? Let him approach me. ⁹Look, the LORD God will help me. Who then can declare me guilty?*" (8-9)?

On the cross, God would pronounce His Son guilty for our sins ... but not for any sins of His own. Jesus remained the holy Son of God, and the Father would be satisfied and raise Him back to life.

As the covid takes its toll on us, my thoughts go to a math teacher in South Dakota. His 12-year-old student could not understand something, so she emailed him, and he showed up in her front yard, whiteboard in hand, teaching through the glass pane of the door.

We are so socially distant now that we always need a barrier between us. That can last for a while, but it's no way to live forever. Jesus removes greater barriers than covid shelter-in-place quarantine window panes. Jesus is about to remove sin. Follow Him this holy week. See how close Jesus gets to His disciples, to His enemies, and to His witnesses at the open grave. Without sin in the way, He's about to get very close. Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.