

Lenten Devotions: Servant Songs 4
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Isaiah 53

53 Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been
revealed?

2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire
him.

3 He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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Familiarity can be a great danger in Christianity. We must be continually surprised by God's love. It seems rather strange, for instance, that when we enter Passiontide near the end of Lent, we cover all the crosses in the church. Passiontide is surely a time to be thinking on the cross, yet, we hide them. We cover the cross because when Good Friday comes we need to again be shocked. We need to once more be shaken up by its horror, its shame—and its glory.

Reading the famous passage of the 'Suffering Servant' in Isaiah 53, can also be a bit too familiar. What happens to you when you hear the words, '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'?

Or how about, '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'?

How does that hit us? We need to be struck this year, this week, this day—and the next, and the next, with the reality of the passion of our Lord.

Walking through the Stations of the Cross is a good way of doing this, provided they themselves don't succumb to over familiarity.

Because to follow someone is not just to do what they do—a like-for-like imitation. To follow someone is to go where they go. It's quite simple really. It is to stop being like sheep who have gone astray and turned their own way.

Lent reminds us of this. Christ goes forty days into the wilderness and we enter our own proverbial forty-day desert, through self denial and self giving—fasting and almsgiving as a fine-tuning of the soul. Following in the way of Jesus preparing ourselves to share in the mystery of his glory at Easter.

But Lent is a dramatisation of our whole lives. Conformity to Christ—the way of the cross—, following in his direction, is not only a Lenten activity. We are the community of the crucified One, a body formed and sustained through crucifixion.

The whole purpose of our existence is to share in the divine life—union with God; to share in who God is. And who God is, is manifest on the cross of Jesus Christ. God is not found outside of Jesus Christ crucified.

To know God is to know God crucified in Christ, and so to follow God is to follow Christ to Jerusalem—to set our face like flint toward a life of surrender, a life of self-giving love: toward *wounds* that *heal*.

And to follow down this path of the cross, the life of the community of the crucified, is to go down towards the healing. 'Out of his anguish *he shall see light*', our Servant Song proclaims.

The passion of the Suffering Servant is our boast and our shame, our joy and our horror. 'Crushed for our iniquities'—shame, disgust, shock, horror. Yet, 'he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous'—*joy*, pure joy.

We are the community of the crucified—the dejected, oppressed, wounded, bruised, the crushed. So we follow. We follow in the way of the cross, meeting Christ at each 'Station'; we go where Jesus goes. We head toward Jerusalem with Christ, so that his Passiontide is ours also, laying down our lives in self-giving love, that the whole world might see the light of Christ's Easter glory.