

Wednesday of Holy Week 2021

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The Lord GOD has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.

Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear; and I have not rebelled, have not turned back.

I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help, therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

He is near who upholds my right; if anyone wishes to oppose me let us appear together.

Who disputes my right? Let him confront me.

See, the Lord GOD is my help; who will prove me wrong?

Matthew 26:14-25

One of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?"

They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and from that time on he looked for an opportunity to hand him over.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples approached Jesus and said, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?"

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The teacher says, My appointed time draws near; in your house I shall celebrate the Passover with my disciples.'"

The disciples then did as Jesus had ordered, and prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the Twelve.

And while they were eating, he said, "Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, "Surely it is not I, Lord?"

He said in reply, "He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me.

The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born."

Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?"

He answered, "You have said so."



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

✠

The Lord GOD is my help; therefore, I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

This we hear from the third of the Suffering Servant Songs from the prophet, Isaiah. Christian tradition understands the Suffering Servant Songs as a prefiguration of the Passion of Jesus Christ, the one who sacrifices for the salvation of others.

It is the docile attitude modeled here that mystifies me. I understand being patient and compassionate, but enduring beatings, beard pulling, and spitting are far more than I am ready to tolerate.

As a former police officer, I was expected to tolerate all levels of verbal abuse. I've been subjected to it all and they often included my sister. I've been called everything except a child of God. (My wife used to tell my hockey playing boys that she didn't want to see them fighting on the ice, unless of course someone said something about their mother).

As a police officer, that passivity was not maintained if physically assaulted. We are duty bound to enforce the law and are morally obliged in self-defense. The force used would be the minimum necessary and commensurate to the offense (ie., police are not to shoot people for spitting on them).

One would not imagine a police officer turning one's back in response to a beating as our Suffering Servant. How could that ever end up good? The police officer needs to return home healthy to their family and offenders need to be stopped in their violence.

How could that ever end up good?

Of course, Jesus comes to mind.

What if in the Garden, when one of Jesus' followers cut off the ear of a servant in the arresting mob, that Jesus didn't stop the violence? What if he had issued more swords?

Jesus healed the wounded and gave himself up to the mob. Jesus emulated the Suffering Servant all the way to the cross where he gave up his spirit.

From a survival standpoint, that didn't work out so well. And yet through the cross, death itself was defeated and all creation made anew.

Now as a confessing sinner, that really works out well for me... and for you, too. But, how do we act like Jesus, like the Suffering Servant? It doesn't happen without prayer, without being deeply rooted in God the Father.

Morning after morning he opens my ear that I may hear.

As I contemplated on what that could look like today, my mind came to rest with Nelson Mandela of South Africa.

From PBS Frontline News:

In the winter of 1964, Nelson Mandela arrived on Robben Island where he would spend 18 of his 27 prison years. Confined to a small cell, the floor his bed, a bucket for a toilet, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He was allowed one visitor a year for 30 minutes. He could write and receive one letter every six months. But Robben Island became the crucible which transformed him. Through his intelligence, charm and dignified defiance, Mandela eventually bent even the most brutal prison officials to his will, assumed leadership over his jailed comrades and became the master of his own prison. He emerged from it the mature leader who would fight and win the great political battles that would create a new democratic South Africa.ⁱ

Mandela was an inspiration to his guards who had once reviled him. Here is one of his guard's testimonials:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-25296656>

These graces manifested through Mandela are beyond human will and compassion. They are gifts from God. Mandela might very well have been chosen. But, so are you. If you haven't heard the call... well, I'm reminded of what my good Cornish grandmother used to say: "None so deaf as those who will not hear."

If you haven't heard... listen more; pray more; be attentive to others. They are messengers from God, prompted by God's nudging.

Avail yourself of the Sacraments. God gave them to us for our present and eternal well-being. Take it personal. God gave the Sacraments to you. Jesus died for you. Jesus is risen and lives for you.

As disciples, we are called to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. We are to be as the Suffering Servant, despite the spiteful defamation and persecution heaped upon us.

The Lord GOD is my help; therefore, I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

✠

i

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/#:~:text=In%20the%20winter%20of%201964%2C%20Nelson%20Mandela%20arrived,allowed%20one%20visitor%20a%20year%20for%2030%20minutes.>