

Sermon – 9-16-2018
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Isaiah 50
By
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We read a lot from Isaiah in worship. Isaiah's prophecies feature prominently in many of our major festivals, including Good Friday. It is probably because many of the passages that are found in Isaiah have very obvious connections to Jesus Christ. Today's reading from Isaiah is a very good example of that. You probably even thought of Jesus as the reading was being proclaimed. It is easy to neglect, though, that there are other people mentioned in these passages. There are other people who act here, and most of their actions are against Jesus.

These are the ones that the Servant encounters. These are the opponents, the ones who do not want to hear what the Servant has to speak to them. They are the ones who beat him, pull out his beard, mock him, and spit at him. They bring charges against him, accuse him, and condemn him. This is the place where we really see Jesus in the Servant, because all these things are what happened to him. Therefore, it is easy for us to merely see those who attack the Servant as the Jews and Romans who conspired to do all this to him, and eventually, to crucify him. But the group is actually wider than that.

In many of Jesus' teachings, he emphasizes that it is not just the action that matters, but a heart toward the action. So, sin

isn't just in what you do, but also in what you dwell on, and even what you are just OK with. What I mean by that is that there were plenty of people that didn't actually yell out for Jesus to be crucified, or took the whip in their hands, or balled up their own saliva to spit in his face. But those same people allowed it to happen, or were just doing their jobs, or didn't give much thought to the things that were happening to Jesus. And we know that things like this routinely happened in the Roman world, and even earlier, and it was not questioned, or pushed back upon. Now, there was definitely push-back on Roman occupation, but as we know from the history of Israel, their ability to lead and guide the people was probably not much better. But let's go even further.

We are the ones who do this to Jesus. When we claim his name, and then allow others to be mistreated, we beat his back. When we claim his name, and then do not listen to cries for help from those who are hurting, because they live differently than us, we pull out his beard. When we claim his name, and then reject fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because they point out our sin, we mock his work. This is all us, even in the church, even in the place of his work. I know that you have probably experienced some of the most difficult interpersonal situations of your life inside a church building. You may have even caused some of them. I know that I have been both on the giving and receiving end. It is in those times, and in so many other ways, that we are the group of people who accuse and condemn Jesus. And when this group is us, verse 9 applies: we will all wear out like a garment. All our fights and neglect and ignorance merely bring all this upon Christ's shoulders again.

But the Servant tells us that his face is set like flint, that nothing will stop him. Why? Because of the one who sends the Servant, the Sovereign Lord. Look what he does for the Servant. He has given the Servant a well-instructed tongue, he helps the Servant, and he vindicates the Servant, proving his word to be true. Therefore, those who go against the Servant are going against the Sovereign Lord himself. The creator of heaven and earth. How do you think that's going to work out for you? This is the work of that God that the Servant is doing. Anything against him is going to fail. And yet, those who are against the Servant are exactly the ones that the Servant has come for.

Those who oppose the Servant are necessarily those who walk in the dark, the ones who have no light. When we oppose the work of the Servant, we do not understand. Our eyes are darkened. But what does verse 10 say to those, even those opposing the Servant to his face? "Trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on their God." Just because you have been opposing the Servant does not mean that you will be utterly destroyed. We will wear out like a garment, but luckily this garment will be changed. And to do that, he has used our opposition. He has used our spitting. He has taken the whole rejection of the world on his shoulders, and it died with him at the cross. And yet, he did not stay dead, and neither do you, in your sins and trespasses and rejection. When you trust in God, and rely on the work of the Servant, and listen to his instruction that sustains the weary, you find eternal life. And that's why we read the whole counsel of God, including Isaiah. AMEN.