

**Good Friday**  
**April 22, 2011**

Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 “The Suffering Servant Triumphs!”

Today we hear the 4<sup>th</sup> of four Servant Songs that Isaiah records for us in his book. Each one teaches us a little more about the nature of the Servant of the Lord, or Messiah, who is coming to serve the world and the will of God. We conclude through these 4 songs that the Messiah is no ordinary person, but rather is very extraordinary and divine. God and humanity are working together in the person of the Servant of the Lord. Today’s reading from Isaiah 52 and 53 takes us deeper in our understanding of the work of Jesus Christ to accomplish the world’s salvation in holy week, and I find it amazing that Isaiah can write down so clearly what Christ will suffer 600 years before Jesus’ birth. Jesus comes to fulfill these words of Isaiah, and we gain the benefit of his willing sacrifice for the world’s sins.

Isaiah writes down for us in his book what God sees. God sees a completed future event. God sees his Son, a servant, who makes wise decisions, who acts faithfully, who completes the work given to him to do. God sees his Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, in heaven with him from eternity, but also with him after completion of his awesome, wisdom filled work. There is no doubt in God’s mind that the future work of the servant will be successful. After what he will do, the Son will continue in the glory and exaltation he enjoys in heaven from eternity as the only begotten Son.

God gives Isaiah the vision to write down. God’s divine Son, who is spirit, will take a human form that at some point will be nearly unrecognizable as being human because of the way he was abused after his arrest and trial. Isaiah writes:

*<sup>14</sup>As many were astonished at you—  
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—*

God’s Son took our flesh and blood for his special work. It was just a few months ago we pondered readings at Christmas and Epiphany which emphasized that God’s Son took our humanity into himself so that in his person he had two natures – divinity and humanity. It is beyond natural comprehension to understand how this is possible or why this is necessary. However, it is definite fact, and predicted in Isaiah’s book in several places, that God becomes flesh and blood. It was necessary that Jesus be both for the special work he was coming into the world to accomplish. His humanity would be necessary in order for the spirit of God to suffer and die.

And Jesus did suffer in his humanity as part of the help he was bringing to a broken creation. We say in the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate. Our text speaks about the Servant of the Lord who will stand before kings, and indeed Jesus stood before the local servant of the Roman Empire, Pilate, as well as before the local king, Herod. They, along with the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin, rejected Jesus and condemned him as worthy of only death. They rejected the God-man Jesus Christ. They spit upon him. They whipped and scourged him. They mocked him. Jesus suffered before the very leaders of the people who had authority to stop the abuse and to free an innocent man. However, they stood silent before Jesus and allowed the injustice to go forward. Jesus suffered unjustly as an innocent man and an innocent God.

And so they led him out to be crucified. Isaiah writes that he carried our grief, our transgressions, and our iniquities. But are we really so bad? Really now, is there anything so awful and terrible about people? Well certainly not by human standards. There are those times we say a cross word to someone else and

justify it to ourselves, but is that so bad? And certainly those thoughts we sometimes have when we criticize others are justified, right? They really deserve the criticism we think in our minds, right? And maybe sometimes we have engaged in violations of commandments that the church holds to be sin, but really now. Haven't we really moved beyond such primitive thoughts? Aren't we more enlightened, wise, even spiritual?

When we think in terms of human standards, we can defend any position or sin we commit in thought, word, and deed. However, we are not talking human standards. The measuring stick Isaiah puts before us in the reading today is God's standards. How have we stood up against God's standards? If we are completely honest with ourselves, by God's measuring stick of the law we fail miserably.

My son used to call me Mr. Fixit because I could fix any broken toy he brought to me to fix. But there are some things I cannot fix. One thing I cannot fix is me when it comes to my sins. You cannot fix yourself either. Only God can fix a fallen creation. It's ironic that today many people are celebrating Earth Day and are looking for an environmentally clean, perfected planet. However, all our efforts to do this will fall short of what we really need. Christ came to fix a broken creation, and it was at the cross that Jesus became Mr. Fixit – the Mr. Fixit for a broken creation.

Jesus became sin at the cross. Jesus took our sins of thoughts, words and deeds upon himself. He felt the guilt that people carry with them through life because of sin. He felt God's wrath at our sins when he hung on the cross. In silence, he willingly hung on the cross with our sins to become our substitute and sacrifice for sin. And when the sacrifice was finished once and for all for the world's sins, Jesus died.

What the onlookers at Golgotha saw that day by 3 PM was a dead man hanging on a cross. Jesus' mother, along with the other women and the apostle John, saw a dead man hanging on a cross. Jesus' enemies, who observed as witnesses to the death, in the end just saw a dead man hanging on a cross. The soldiers doing their duty saw a dead man hanging on a cross. Joseph of Arimathea, who came to claim the lifeless, limp body hanging on the cross, felt the dead weight of the body he took down from the cross.

God saw something else that day. God saw the second person of the Holy Trinity hanging dead on the cross. God saw his only-begotten Son from eternity hanging dead on the cross.

Who was right? Both were. God and humanity joined together on the cross died on the cross. The humanity of Jesus died on the cross, but also God died on the cross according to the human nature of Jesus Christ. Jesus – God and human – died.

Death is the end of all we know. It is all we can see. It is final. Complete. It means we must grieve, bury our dead, and move on with life. Isaiah associates Jesus' burial with a rich man, and so in fulfillment of this reading 630 years before Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, took the dead body of Jesus and buried him in his own tomb. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women were witnesses of Jesus burial. There they left him in the tomb, never to see him again – or so they thought – sealed behind the stone

But Isaiah writes that God sees the resurrection of his Son after his obedient suffering and death. It was not just that he should suffer and die for our sins, but Jesus would rise again to declare us righteous, that is not guilty any longer of sin. For Christ, God's Son, lives now to see those who turn to him in repentance to receive forgiveness of sins. We are those who have turned to him in forgiveness, and we have new life in his name.

The sacrifice for our sins is complete. God and humanity join together in the person of Jesus Christ to become the Servant of the Lord, and our Savior. Our sins are no longer ours. They were on Christ, and they were left in the grave. God welcomes us into his family, forgiven, reconciled, and justified. We live through his victory. The Suffering Servant triumphs for you!

*soli deo gloria*