

Year B Proper 24  
Isaiah 53:4-12  
Psalm 91:9-16  
Hebrews 5:1-10  
Mark 10:35-45  
Cynthia C. Knapp  
Oct. 21, 2018

Over the years I have had the privilege of conducting funerals for all kinds of people: rich and poor, pillars of the community and those who were relatively unknown, people with impressive resumes and people who were the salt of the earth. What stands out to me are the lives the person has touched for good, the difference they have made, and the blessing they have been to others. That is a legacy worth talking about. Charlie died about 3 years ago. He was so wild in his younger years that we took a decidedly unusual approach in his funeral and used for the gospel lesson the story of the prodigal son. As an adult Charlie had come back to the Lord settled down and become a high school teacher. But it was those very character traits that had been his derailing in his youth that helped him to be a great teacher, especially for those kids other teachers labeled difficult or perhaps even unteachable. He understood them and could respond with compassion because he had walked in their shoes. He knew how it felt to be in their skin. Instead of

standing over them in judgment he held them close to his heart and walked beside them to give them the encouragement and support they needed to find healing and wholeness. Instead of lecturing he listened. They would come to him with their troubles to talk. When they ran away from home they ran to his house. And when they were ready to listen he spoke into their lives with love and understanding. The Lord used those very things that had been his own downfall to become a source of blessing and a way back to redemption for others. Because he had known the forgiveness, grace, and extravagant love of the Father who had welcomed him back with open arms in spite of his own waywardness and sin, he could come alongside others who had gone astray and give them hope in the grace and mercy of God who alone could fill their aching longing and heal their brokenness.

The prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 speaks to us of one who has suffered in every way that we have suffered and more. He

has walked in our shoes, he knows the emotional pain of rejection and ridicule, and the physical pain of excruciating suffering and death. He knows what it is to be falsely accused and maligned. And none of this was anything he deserved. Truly he has walked in our shoes and far beyond anything we have had to endure.

Jesus himself referred to this prophecy as one that foretold his life and death. It is the image of one who is both the High Priest of the people and the sacrifice himself. He is the one who is going into the presence of God carrying the weight of the people on his shoulders and their names on the breastplate over his heart that he might be a representative for them in offering a sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins, restoring their right relationship with God. He is also himself the sacrifice. Historically, the high priest first had to make a sacrifice for his own sin and had to sacrifice for the people year after year because the sacrifice was never sufficient. Jesus, who had no sin and was both human and divine was able to pay the price for our sins once and for all. He placed on himself the sins of the world, carrying them away as far as the east is from the west. He died on our behalf, the all-sufficient sacrifice, that we might be restored to a right relationship with God.

What makes this prophecy so awful is the way this High Priest was

treated and the way this gift of his life was received by those he came to save. He was scorned, rejected, tortured, and crucified by the very ones he came to redeem. Even those closest to him abandoned him in his hour of need. Truly there is no suffering we endure that he has not known. Nothing we have walked that he isn't walking with us with complete understanding not only because he is God and knows all things but because he himself has walked that road before. It certainly takes the wind out of our self-righteous sails when we start to go down the road of asking, "Why me?"

In the middle of the prophecy about the suffering servant is one line that reminds us of our own sin, our own failings and need for salvation. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way." Paul says in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The Psalmist laments, "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt, there is no one who is righteous. No not even one." Psalm 14:1-3

Even the three disciples that were closest to Jesus, the innermost circle who were being prepared to lead the others in bringing the good news of

salvation to the world, went astray. Remember it was Peter, James, and John who alone were permitted to come in with Jesus when he raised the little girl from the dead. It was Peter, James, and John who were with him on the mountain when he was transfigured before them in all his glory and appeared with Moses and Elijah. Of all the disciples you would think they at least would stay on track and fully understand the true identity of Jesus. But here in our gospel reading from Mark, James and John are jockeying for power and position. They even had the gall to come to Jesus and ask him to do whatever they wanted, as if he answered to them! They had the nerve to ask him to promise them the positions of sitting at his right hand and his left when he came into his reign. Had they truly understood the nature of the one they approached they would never have asked him to do what they wanted, they would have never presumed to sit at his right hand and his left as if they were on the same level as the son of God. Instead they would have fallen face down prostrate before him throwing themselves at his mercy. Only by his mercy and grace could they have even hoped to be able to come into his presence.

It's easy for us to look on them in judgment- as did the other disciples, shocked to think that two of the closest disciples to Jesus had such an

elevated opinion of themselves and such a failure to understand who Jesus was as to ask such a thing. We are shocked until we realize how often we have done the same thing without even realizing it. How often do we go to God in prayer asking him to do whatever we ask of him and feeling God has somehow failed us when he doesn't? How often do we presume to rule beside God in assuming we know what is best not only for ourselves but for others we are praying for, even for our country and our world? How often do we pray that God will do what *we* will instead of praying that *God's* will be done? Truly we too have gone astray. Without even realizing it, we so often forget who we are addressing and fail to humble ourselves before the Lord, falling on our knees in worship and praise, grateful beyond words for all He has done for us. We forget. We have become so familiar, so accustomed to this privilege of a personal relationship with God that we forget who we are talking to. Is it any wonder that those who were closest to Jesus also sometimes forgot or didn't really understand just who it was they were talking to?

Certainly Peter also forgot. Peter who swore he would die for Jesus denied even knowing him when asked by a mere stranger if he was one of his disciples. Yet Jesus forgave him and reinstated him as a leader

among the disciples. Do you love me? He asked. "Feed my sheep."

I believe it is by design that there are three vignettes in a row in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark where people are seeking Jesus. The rich young ruler is led astray from following him by his greater desire for wealth. James and John have been distracted by their desire for power and position. It is only the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, who calls out to Jesus for salvation. He is sitting on the roadside in filthy rags, the clothing of a beggar humbled by life's circumstances, and suffering not only in his poverty and physical blindness but by the scorn and mistreatment of others. He sees in Jesus the Messiah, the one who has the divine power and authority to save him and make him whole. Undistracted by the things this world has to offer, he alone is able to see who Jesus is, and so is ready to receive his sight and be made whole. The restoration of his sight is an outward sign that he has been redeemed and is ready to follow Jesus.

Jesus knew that Peter was both bold and impulsive when he called him. He knew that James and John were nicknamed "Sons of thunder" when he called them- they must have had the kind of character that was strong but also prone to arrogance to merit such a name. But these character traits that were the source

of their downfall were also used by God for good and even perhaps necessary in standing up to the kind of rejection and opposition they would face in spreading the gospel. But before they could begin, they needed to face the suffering of the cross, the miraculous power of God in the victory over sin and death of the resurrection, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost to be ready for the work they were being given to do. Only then would they be humbled, restored, and forgiven, knowing that the all-surpassing power was from God and not from themselves. (2 Cor. 4:7)

When we recognize that compared to the power and glory of God, all that we have to offer is but filthy rags, we are ready to be lifted out of those rags and clothed with the redemption and spirit of God to be a new creature in Christ. He redeems all that we are, even those characteristics that may have caused us to go astray, to be transformed and used for good, so that we too many be privileged to serve in his name and for the glory of God. The Lord speaks to us his promise of redemption by his grace and mercy in the words of Psalm 91: "Because he is bound to me in love, therefore will I deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my Name." (v. 14) Amen