

**SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S  
"A COMMUNITY OF HOPE"**

# **Like One Taught**

**The Sunday of the Passion:  
Palm Sunday, Year B**

**April 5, 2009**

**The Rev. Dr. Mario Gonzalez del Solar  
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Isaiah 50:4-9**

**T**he Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. 5 The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. 6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. 7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. 8 He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! 9 It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

There really couldn't be a wider chasm between the two passages from Mark that we've read this morning. On one hand you've got the celebration and wild enthusiasm of the crowds as Jesus come into Jerusalem: Palm Sunday. On the other is the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark. These two passages take you from people cheering Jesus as their king to watching him suffer cruelly. "Passion" is just an old-fashioned word for "suffering".

Jesus was physically tortured. He was verbally abused. All this was done under the guise of a legal proceeding that by any standard was a gross miscarriage of justice in which an innocent person was sentenced to receive the death penalty with the full knowledge of both his accusers and the judge. And to

add to his physical and legal abuse by “the system”, Jesus’ closest friends and associates denied him and ran out on him. They left him alone to suffer these unimaginable abuses and brutal death.

By today’s standards, what Jesus suffered is a crime against humanity. It’s sobering to read. It’s ghastly to really think about. Yet the accounts of Jesus’ suffering make up a large part of all the accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry in all four gospels. There are sixteen chapters in Mark, which begins with Jesus as an adult. Six of those chapters deal with the events of his last week on earth. When you look at what has been written in the gospels about Jesus, it’s clear that the primary focus and weight is on his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. This fact led a biblical scholar a hundred years ago to comment that the gospels in the New Testament are “passion narratives with extended introductions.” Why is the bulk of the narrative about Jesus devoted to his sufferings rather than say his teachings, or his miracles?

I think we can get some insight about this question about the New Testament by turning to the Old Testament, to our reading from Isaiah 50. Here we have Christ, in the Holy Spirit, speaking in the words of the prophet some 700 years before the incarnation of Jesus. This is the third of the four so-called “servant songs” in the Book of Isaiah. The servant of God in Isaiah is the one God has chosen, the one who is perfectly obedient, the one who carries out God’s will no matter what. In our reading the servant is being disciplined by God. He is being prepared for what God wants him to do: **“the Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.”** The servant is being instructed by God to sustain the weary. He is continually hearing from God. Every morning of every day he receives instruction and teaching. This is an intimate relationship between teacher and disciple. It is a relationship of absolute trust. It’s the servant’s absolute trust in his teacher that enables him to stand firm in the face of terrible abuse: **“The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. 6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. 7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”** This is Christ, the servant of God, the Son of God, enduring the hatred and abuse of a fallen humanity hostile to him and to his Father. How can he endure? Because he knows that **“the Sovereign LORD helps me.”** The Sovereign Lord is Lord of all history, of all creation, of heaven and earth, of past, present and future. Though Christ the Servant is being treated like the lowest kind of criminal, he knows he is not guilty. He knows what his

accusers don't know: he will live, but **“they will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.”** There will come a day when these powerful, these elite, these respected people who have him where they want him will be of no more important than a pile of moth-eaten rags.

What does Jesus' suffering mean for us? It means that because Jesus is God, God has not exempted himself from the suffering and hardship human beings go through in this life. It means that because Jesus is human, he knows, better than any of us know, the lowest and most extreme anguish people endure in this life. There is no shame, no humiliation, no pain, no rejection or loneliness, that he has not suffered completely.

It means also that Jesus' intimate trust in his Father and his intimate experience with our suffering uniquely and absolutely qualifies him to save us completely. He is completely God. And he is completely human, down to the bruises and lacerations and wounds. If he were a pristine, shining God in heaven who never dirtied his hands with what we go through on earth, how could he really save us, in the language of the King James, **“to the uttermost”**? His salvation would only be mechanical and external. He would be like a lifeguard who saves a drowning man by throwing him a rope from beach and reeling him in, rather than running into the water and struggling against the waves himself.

It means that through this terrible suffering God and his Son and Servant Jesus has been vindicated in Jesus' resurrection, and will be vindicated again on the last day. The one who was unjustly judged will return to judge all humanity with perfect justice. The evil will be condemned and the righteous in Christ vindicated. The reason so much of the gospels is dedicated to the suffering and death of Jesus is that is Christ's sufferings, his death and his rising to life again that saves us, not his teaching or his miracles.

Jesus' suffering means that if there are no shortcuts to God's salvation and victory and vindication for him, there aren't any for us. He was disciplined by God to stand firm in the face of the hostile abuse of this self-centered world. Let us be disciplined by God, just as he was. Let us stand firm in the face of the opposition to God's word that we encounter from ourselves and this world in our thoughts, in our actions, in the focus of what we live for. Let us know that it is the Sovereign LORD who helps us, who has sent his Son to experience the depths of this life. Let us waken morning by morning to be his servants and children. Let us listen to him as he speaks to us in his Word. Let us depend on him in prayer. Let him instruct us to sustain the weary with a word, to serve him with all our hearts.

Let us pray.