



Behold My Servant

Holy Week Meditations

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Introduction

Behold My Servant: Holy Week Meditations follows the Revised Common Lectionary readings. The Lectionary is a three-year cycle of selected Scriptures for the seasons of the Church year, including Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. Although the lectionary includes readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, the Epistles, and the Gospels, these Holy Week meditations focus on the Old Testament readings in Isaiah.

The meditations are meant to be devotional and transformational spiritual practices, and not a Bible Study. However, it might be helpful to understand some background and brief outline of the content of the Servant Songs found in **Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12.**

The Servant. The role and mission of the Servant is the redemption of God's people Israel, as well as all the people of the nations. Although Biblical scholars have not reached consensus on the identity of the Servant, most identify the servant as the Messiah, the Christ, the One who is to come and who will supremely incarnate the mission and purpose of God.

Through the voice of the prophet Isaiah, God extends his call for salvation to the ends of the earth: *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other...Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear."* (Isaiah 45:22-23)

In the New Testament, we see Jesus Christ is this exalted one: *"Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11)

The Prophet Isaiah. The writings of Isaiah have been a source of rich treasure that will "stand forever" as the voice of the Spirit speaks for all time. Isaiah is the good news of the Old Testament as the prophet proclaims salvation through the sacrifice of the Servant. During this global season of deep change and emotional upheaval, I have glimpsed the inner joy of the man, the prophet, who does not despair of sin and rebellion because he has seen the Holy Lord "sitting on a throne high and lifted up." Isaiah has responded to the call of God to listen and speak saying, "Here I Am," showing us the way to return in rest, quietness, and trust.

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,

"In returning and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."
Isaiah 30:15

How to Best Use these Meditations

1. Be intentional to make space and time alone with God to listen in silence to his Spirit. You can choose to do these meditations during Holy Week itself or any time during the Easter season.
2. Read the Scripture from Isaiah each day

Palm Sunday. Read Isaiah 50:7.

Monday. Read Isaiah 42:1-9.

Tuesday. Read Isaiah 49:1-6.

Wednesday. Read Isaiah 50:4-9.

Thursday. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:5.

Friday. Read Isaiah 53:6-12.

Easter Sunday. Read John 20.

Lectio Divina. "Divine Reading" is a practice of reading and praying the Scriptures in order to hear a word from God. This attentive reading puts us in a place to stay alert to connections the Spirit may make between the message and what is going on in our lives. The following steps are a simple method:

Each day start by reading the passage through the first time slowly. As you read, you may be aware of a phrase or even a word that catches your attention. After a minute or two of silent openness to the Spirit of God, read the passage for a second time. Now, sit with the phrase or word that has stood out, repeating it gently, pondering it in your heart. Then, as a way of responding to the phrase or word, express what you are hearing in a prayer rising up from within. Allow yourself to rest in God in moments of silence.

3. Follow the prompts to reflect, imagine, and respond in prayer and praise. Journal your thoughts and personal prayers as you listen and respond to the Spirit.

Visio Divina. "Divine Seeing" or *Imagination* is an ancient form of Christian prayer in which we encounter God's presence and spirit using our imagination to enter into an image or a story in God's Word. The images for each day's meditations are prayerfully selected to guide you to pay attention with your senses, and see at a more contemplative pace in connecting with God. Make time and space to use your imagination to see deeply, beyond your first impression or previous knowledge. Allow yourself to be seen, touched, surprised and transformed by God.

An optional Holy Week practice is to read the entire passion narrative in all four of the Gospels. One guide you can use: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/harmony/index.cfm>

Synopsis of Readings

Each day will focus on one of the four Servant Songs along with complimentary readings from the New Testament that show the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Palm Sunday. Read Isaiah 50:7.

The Servant: Determined.

The mission will be brought about through the determined obedience and undeserved suffering of the servant. Jesus resolutely **"set his face like a flint"** and **"emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."** Philippians 2:7-8. As God's Servant, Jesus was resolved to be "pierced and crushed" and "poured out his soul to death" so that on Easter Sunday his resurrection would bring redemption.

Monday. Read Isaiah 42:1-9.

The Servant: Chosen.

In the first Servant Song, the servant is introduced in royal and prophetic terms as the one chosen by the Lord to bring justice to the nations. The Servant's ministry will be as a new covenant for Israel as well as a light for all nations. Matthew identifies Jesus as the Chosen Servant in Matt 12:18-21. Matthew writes to the Jewish people with powerful evidence from Isaiah's Servant Song. The covenant made with Israel to bless all the peoples of the earth will now be completed through the Servant Messiah.

Tuesday. Read Isaiah 49:1-6.

The Servant: Beauty.

The second Servant Song emphasizes the calling of the servant to glorify God (display his Beauty) by making known the sharp sword of the Word of God, and being a light beyond the borders of Israel to include all nations. Paul identifies Jesus as "the light for the Gentiles bringing salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49) in Acts 13:47. John identifies Jesus as the Word of God. (John 1:1-3).

Wednesday. Read Isaiah 50:4-9.

The Servant: Awakens.

In the third Servant song, there is an intimate connection between "the Lord God" and the Servant. The Servant is awakened and awakens through the sustaining Word of the Lord. Yet now the Servant's steadfast obedience leads to emotional and physical suffering. With resolute determination, the Servant walks into humiliation and abuse, knowing the final outcome will bring glory to the Lord God.

Thursday. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:5.

The Servant: Crushed.

The fourth Servant Song reveals the suffering of the Servant with the surprising truth that the power of God's arm will crush him as the substitute scapegoat for the sins of us all. The Servant, free from sin, accomplishes his redemptive mission with the crushing, piercing, and breaking of his body. On this Thursday night of Holy Week, Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks, and breaks it saying, "This is my body which is for you." (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Friday. Read Isaiah 53:6-12.

The Servant: The Lamb of God.

This last section of the fourth Servant Song concludes with the absolute uniqueness of the servant through both his suffering and exaltation. The Servant “pours out his soul to death” as an offering for our righteousness. Paul identifies Jesus as this Servant: “Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with a God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

Easter Sunday. Read John 20.

This is the day we have been waiting for and we are awakened from our fears, doubts, and isolation as the exalted Servant of the Lord God has risen! He returns as the lamb of God who was slain, revealing the marks of his sacrifice. Yet fully God, he breaths on us the Holy Spirit, as we are now the chosen who will be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Jesus Identified as The Servant in the New Testament

Isaiah 42:1	Matthew 12:17-21	Mark 10:45- Jesus identifies as Servant
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:38	Gospel writers identify Jesus as the Servant
Isaiah 53:12	Luke 22:37	Jesus identifies as Servant
Isaiah 53:7-8	Acts 8:32-35 Philip	Philip identifies Jesus as the Servant
Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67; 27:30	Account of physical torture

Commentary Sources:

Oswalt, John N. The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

The Broadman Bible Commentary, Volume 5 Isaiah, Broadman Press, 1971.

F. Duane Lindsey, "Isaiah's Songs of the Servant, Bibliotheca Sacra 139, 1982.

Images:

Cover photo, and p14: *Sacrificial Grace*, Makoto Fujimura

p.6: Enrique Simonet-Flevit Super Illam-1892.

p.8: Coronation of David, King of Israel, as depicted in the Paris Psalter.

p.11: Image by Denise Chan on Unsplash

p.16: Agnus Dei, c.1636/40, Francisco de Zurbaran

p. 18 “Jesus Shows Himself to Thomas” by Rowan and Irene LeCompte. (This is one of six murals in the Resurrection Chapel at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.)

Scripture References: The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

The Servant: Determined Palm Sunday. Isaiah 50:7

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.



*"Behold, your King is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden."*

Entering Jerusalem on the back of a colt as a King, Jesus surely must have had mixed emotions as the welcoming crowd worshipped him as the Messiah, waving palms and shouting: *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"* (Matt 21:5,9)

The praise is short-lived as in just five days the words of Isaiah the prophet will come about: *"I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting."* *Isaiah 50:5-6* How did Jesus have the courage to ride into the arena of disgrace and death? The prophet foretells his steadfast determination with this simile:

"But the Lord God helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be put to shame." Isa. 50:7 ESV

Steadfast Resolve. Solid. Unmoving. Determined Obedience.

Adventurous Obedience, the title of my blog reflections, is a guiding prayer for my life to be centered and focused on the adventure of following Christ. Adventurous means a willingness to respond with bold denial of self to take up our cross, to risk dropping everything to follow in obedience.

A life of determined obedience is a lot like the sequence of events in Holy Week. On Palm Sunday, Christ is rightly identified and worshipped as the King. But the chaos brought about by sin and self quickly turns to pain and death on Good Friday. Jesus, God's Humble Servant, with determined obedience, "**set his face like a flint**" and "*emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*" Philippians 2:7-8. He was "pierced and crushed" and poured out his soul to death so that Easter Sunday could bring transformation, glory and resurrection redemption.

REFLECT. Jesus was steadfast and immovable in fulfilling his mission even in the face of his own suffering. As he might have stood on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city, Luke tells us "he wept over it." (Luke 19:41) Some years later, Paul also faced imminent danger in Jerusalem, but he said, "I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." His friends who were trying to dissuade him, finally stopped objecting and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:13-14) As you reflect on the determined obedience of our Lord, what stirs in your own heart for your city?

IMAGINE. Spend a few moments looking at the image of Jesus pressing forward to Jerusalem. What catches your attention as you take in the whole scene? Now look at the details. Look at each one of the disciples. What must be going through their minds? Do you see yourself in one of them? Look at Jesus more closely. What do you hear him saying? Now look at the city Jesus is looking toward. What do you see? What might God be saying to you about your own city? Return again to look at the picture as a whole. Put your thoughts and feelings in the form of a prayer.

PRAY. O Jesus, you demonstrate such steadfast love and devotion in finishing the work the father has sent you to do. Set your Spirit on me to not value anything in my life as precious except to finish my ministry that I have received from you Lord. With determined obedience, I take up my cross and follow you. Amen.

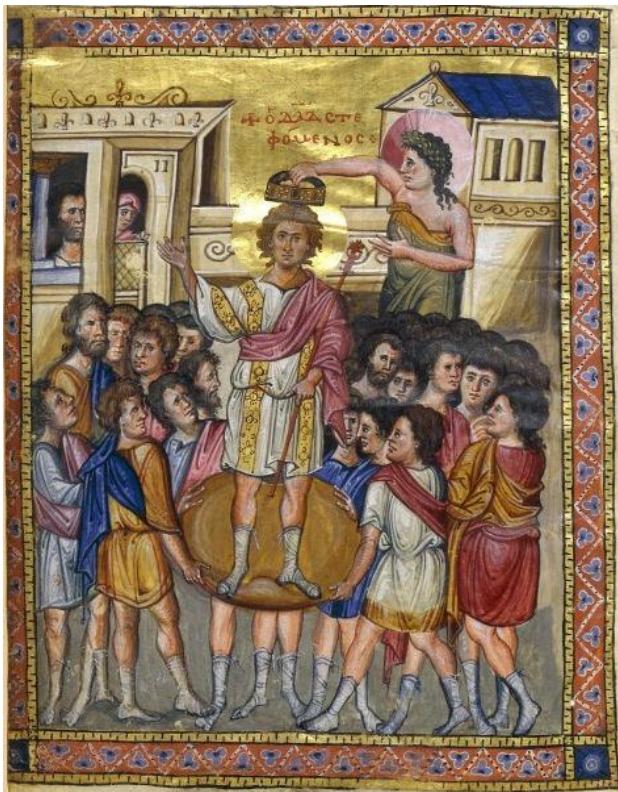
PRAISE. As you enter into meditation each day this week, sit in a quiet space and listen to instrumental music, allowing it to comfort and rest your spirit:

Behold My Servant. Austin Stone Worship. <https://youtu.be/ibOSvkICrtA>

The Servant: Chosen

Monday Isaiah 42:1-9

I uphold my chosen Servant, in whom my soul delights.



The Coronation of King David depicted here, reflects the desire of the people of Israel for a royal leader, anointed and chosen by God. The Servant pictured in Isaiah was first understood by the Jews as referring to Israel, but the figure came to be understood as Messianic by the early church. In his gospel, Matthew draws attention to the quiet nature of Jesus as he commands those he healed “not to make him known.” He quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 in his longest Old Testament quotation (Matthew 12:18-21) identifying Jesus as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, God’s Chosen Servant, the bearer of God’s Spirit, with a mission extending beyond Israel to all peoples:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.
Isaiah 42:1-4

Behold my servant. Behold. The King. This is the language of presentation for a King commissioned to establish justice. *Look.* See that God's mission for his Servant will not be with the usual arrogant pomp and crushing power of worldly conquerors, but in and through Himself and his Word. *"My Chosen in whom my soul delights."*

I have put my Spirit upon him. Anointed. The servant is anointed for his mission to bring justice to all the nations. There is repeating and increasing emphasis that the Servant will bring forth justice in truth and put justice in place. The anointed Servant speaks as God, brings deliverance for all peoples, and instructs them in the Way of the Lord. At the baptism of Jesus, Matthew again identifies Jesus as the one commissioned for the Messiah's Mission with the Spirit's visible anointing and God the Father's audible blessing. “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him.” (Matthew 3:16) Jesus is the Chosen One, the Beloved Son.

He will bring forth Justice. The Servant is the One Chosen to set things right not only for Israel, but for all nations, because sin and idolatry have resulted in rebellion against God's right order. The Hebrew word for justice, "mišPät" broadly means bringing a just order to the earth, and specifically here that all nations are brought under God's rule through the sacrifice of God's Servant.

IMAGINE. What does the imagery of the Servant, the Chosen One, stirs up in you? Imagine yourself in the crowd at Jesus' baptism. Find yourself in the crowd and watch Jesus as he enters the river, then as John lowers and raises him out of the water. Do you see the dove? And hear the voice of God, saying: "You are my Beloved." What does this seem to do for Jesus? Now, take your turn in the river. Let John lower you into the river. Feel the water. As you come back up, how is God looking at you? What do you hear him saying? Find Jesus again, and sit beside him for a while.

Isaiah 42:5-9 *Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them."*

"I Am the Lord." "It is I, the Lord," this Hebrew phrase emphasizes the identity of the One calling, the Creator God. God addresses and assures the Servant, using the singular Hebrew for "you" four times: I have called You, I will take You, I will keep You, I will give You. The Servant's Lord, the Creator God, the Great I Am, is present and incomparable.

Light for the Nations. All people. The light comes by way of the covenant--first made with a particular people called to be his servants, and then expanded to the entire world. Jesus boldly identifies himself as this Servant as he picks up the Isaiah scroll and proclaims, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21, Isaiah 61:1-3) Jesus declares in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." I AM LIGHT.

REFLECT. Isaiah is caught up in the joy and praise that as God's Chosen One, the Servant will offer God's salvation, grace, and glory to all people. He calls all people everywhere, from the sea, to the coastlands, to the deserts, and to the mountains to "Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth." (42:10-12) Make room in your meditation for joy and hope, centered on our incomparable Creator God and let your soul delight in the Chosen Servant, Jesus.

PRAISE. Allow Isaiah's vision of the song of praise to God: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory," to call you into praise and worship today. (Isaiah 6:1-2)

Sing along with Audrey Assad's version of Holy, Holy, Holy <https://youtu.be/AgHrNNM23p8>

The Servant: Beauty

Tuesday, Isaiah 49:1-6

You are My Servant in whom I will be seen in all Beauty.



The purpose of God's redemptive work for all nations is richly revealed with this oft-repeated phrase in Isaiah: "*that I may be glorified*" which in Hebrew means "*that I may display my Beauty.*" The Servant's life is God's Beauty on display, from his calling and naming in the womb, to being the Word of God and Salvation to the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:1-3. Listen to me, O coastlands, and give attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. ²He made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand, he

*hid me; he made me a polished arrow; in his quiver he hid me away. ³And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified. (in whom I will **display my beauty**)."*

Listen to me. The Servant calls with authority for all the nations to listen to the Word of God: "*You people from afar, listen.*" Pay attention to the message which is being shouted with joy to the ends of the earth.

(Isaiah 48:20) **He named my name.** The Servant says the Lord has called him by name. This is a connection between the Servant's name being known before birth to that of the Messiah being named Immanuel before birth: "*Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14) and the name Jesus being given before his birth in Matthew 1:21. Do you hear it? The message of joy, Immanuel, God is with us, Beauty has come. God says: Hear me O peoples: *I will be Glorified! I will display my Beauty.*

Sharp Sword. Listen to Living Word of God. This Servant will accomplish God's will, not with military power, but by the proclamation of God's eternal truth. John identifies Jesus as the Word of God: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*" The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12) Like a sharpened sword resting on his side, the Servant is equipped and ready to accomplish his Mission. "*My Word that goes out from my mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.*" (Isaiah 55:11) In John's Revelation (1:16), Jesus is described in Glory: "*From his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*" Do you see it? The Beauty of Light shining off this Sharp Sword ready to do God's work.

A Polished Arrow. Like a sharp sword resting under the hand and arrows sharpened and polished in the quiver, the Servant is available and equipped for the Lord God's use at any moment.

You are my Servant, Israel. Naming the Servant Israel here is more of a redemptive function than the identity of the nation of Israel, especially since the passage has the clear tone of an individual as the Servant. Israel was meant to bring the nations could come to God, but as Isaiah points out, they are a blind, deaf, and rebellious nation that cannot show anyone else the way. This called individual servant, the ideal Israel will be for the world what the people of Israel could not be. God has called the Servant for this work, and God will be seen in all his beauty. The Lord redeems Israel, the planting of his hands, for his glory, to display his Beauty (Isaiah 44:23; 60:21; 61:3)

Isaiah 49:4-6. *But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my right is with the Lord, and my recompense with my God." And now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*

Yet Surely. On the one hand the Servant admits feelings of futility, but on the other hand the Servant is fully confident and trusts that the God who called and equipped him, will complete the mission to restore Israel, not just physically by being freed from captivity, but spiritually with a restored relationship with God. This Servant cannot be Israel or any prophet, but the Redeemer Messiah.

Light for the Nations. The mission of Israel was nothing less than to be “a light to the nations,” the means of bringing the redemptive blessing of God originally promised through a covenant with Abraham. *“I will bless you and make your name great SO THAT you will be a blessing...in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”* (Gen 12:3; Psalm 67:1-3) The Messiah is the Servant who would be in his own person, the identity and mission of Israel. God will bring about all he intended for the nations through the Messiah, as Jesus himself says, *“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* Luke 24:45-47

Salvation to the Ends of the Earth. Chosen for All. This is an explicit mission for which the Servant is chosen—not just to be the means of God’s salvation to the world, but to *be* salvation. Paul reminds us of Jesus’ command to be a witness of his salvation, “to the ends of the earth.” When the people heard Paul’s words they rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord. (Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 in Acts 13:47). Open your eyes to see the Beauty of this all-encompassing salvation. How might God be asking you to display the Beauty of God, available to all people through your witness?

IMAGINE. Open your eyes to see the Beauty of this all-encompassing salvation. Isaiah himself is swept up in wonder and joy at God’s purpose to be glorified through the Servant, displaying His beauty for all the people of the world to see. Listen to Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me... “to give to those who mourn—a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified (or that he may display his beauty).”* Isaiah 61:3. See yourself wearing a beautiful headdress, an amazing garment of praise and standing as a strong oak of righteousness.

PRAY. O Beautiful God. You are a brilliant light for the nations. The sharp sword of your Word teaches me all I need to follow you. I clap my hands in joy for the accomplishment of all your plans. One thing I do ask, and I seek with all my heart: May I dwell in your house all the days of my life, gazing on your beauty. Amen.

PRAISE. Psalm 27:4 draws us in to worship the Beauty of the Lord: *“One thing I have asked of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the Beauty of the Lord!”*

Psalm 27 (One Thing). Shane and Shane <https://youtu.be/ndZsEDuCVAQ>

The Servant: Awakens

Wednesday, Isaiah 50:4-9

He wakens me morning by morning.

In this third Servant song, there is an intimate connection between “the Lord God” (Sovereign Lord) and the Servant. The Servant is awakened and awakens through the sustaining Word of the Lord. Yet now the Servant’s steadfast obedience leads to emotional and physical suffering.



Isaiah 50:4-7 *The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are **taught**, that I may know how to **sustain** with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he **awakens**; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I **gave my back** to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord God helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore, I have **set my face like a flint**, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

Taught. “*The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to **sustain** with a word him who is weary.* The Servant speaks with confidence in the calling of the Sovereign Lord and ultimate victory, centering his mission to declare God’s Word to the world. The Servant is intimately connected to God as one who knows the Word and how to sustain, not destroy with this powerful truth.

Jesus invites us to be intimately connected with him as life-long learners, to be taught, sustained, and to find rest. (Matthew 11:28-29) A disciple speaks what he or she has learned through sitting in the presence of the Lord God. Are your words for others spoken out of your own intimate connection with the Almighty God?

Awakens. *Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear. The Lord God has opened my ear.*” What does it look like for your ears to be “awakened” each morning to hear the Lord? “*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*” (Lamentations 3:22-23) Morning by morning signifies the daily, ever-present, life-long faithfulness of God to meet us, to awaken our spirits, open our ears, beckoning us to follow. The Servant’s awakened ear shows obedience even to the point of humiliation and suffering. Jesus declares this obedience: “And he who has sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” John 8:29 What might God be saying to you about waking up early, to be in silence and solitude, waiting and listening?

I offered my back. In this third servant song we see the integral role of Obedience in the calling and mission of the Servant. “*I lay down my life for the sheep...for this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life*

that I may take it up again." John 10:15-17. The humiliation Jesus received was reserved for criminals. (Matt. 26:67; 27:30). 'I offered my back to those who beat me' probably denotes a public punishment, at least a beating or scourging by authorities. Pulling out the beard, mocking, and spitting were signs of contempt. Thus, these sufferings are seen as a prophecy of the maltreatment of Christ on the morning of the crucifixion.

No Shame. Face Like a Flint. "*I have set my face like a flint; and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. The Lord God helps me.*" The Servant's steadfast determination is solid as rock and his trust in his Father, the Lord God absolutely immovable as he submits to public humiliation. In any culture, this kind of meek and silent submission seems an admission of guilt, but the Servant declares, "No Shame," because he suffered out of obedience, not disobedience. Therefore, God declares him innocent. "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Cor. 5:21) With resolute determination, the Servant walks into humiliation and abuse, knowing the final outcome will bring glory to the Lord God. Jesus in his final hours prayed: "*Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.*"

Wake Up to Listen. The Servant's connection to the Lord God was awakened in the morning by listening and being taught, sustained and ready for obedience. What space can you provide for a sacred encounter with the Sovereign Lord God? Do you find yourself trying to spend time with the Lord sitting at your busy work desk, or in a noisy place? The Servant's connection to the Lord God was awakened in the morning by listening and being taught, sustained and ready for obedience. What space can you provide for a sacred encounter?

From the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, people may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:6)

PRAY. *Unlike you Jesus, I am guilty of disobedience and a rebellious spirit, yet you hear my cry for forgiveness and heal my shame. O God forgive me, help me listen, to hear your voice, to keep my eyes open. I choose to be pruned by your sharp sword and sustained with your Word. Rescue me O Lord. Awaken Me Every Morning.*

IMAGINE. Remember the last time you watched the sunrise in the early morning. See the light and feel the warmth of the sun. Think of a morning moment or sacred place when you felt your spirit awakened to the presence of God and your ears opened to hear his voice. Sit again with the special connection you enjoyed. Imagine what Moses might have felt when God called to him out of the burning bush. It was holy ground and Moses responded, "Here I am." Think of yourself being there, being drawn toward the light, surprised by the voice of God, taking off your shoes, all your senses alive to holy awakening. How do you respond?

PRAISE. Audrey Assad's "New Every Morning." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Grz3Hxw9GWU>

The Servant: Crushed

Thursday Isaiah 52:13-53:5

Behold my Servant shall be high and lifted up.

This fourth and final song focuses on the great contrast between the Servant's exaltation and his humiliation and suffering.



Makoto Fujimura, is a Christian artist who uses a Japanese style of painting called Nihonga. Semi-precious stone such as lapis lazuli is crushed into mineral pigments. A pigment absorbs and reflects transmitted light, but without the breaking and crushing of the stone, there would not be the splendor of the colors shimmering in refracted light. This piece, "Sacrificial Grace" is a visual testament to the determination of Christ to be crushed and broken to bring us peace and healing.

Isaiah 52: 13-15 *Behold, my servant shall act wisely (accomplish his purpose); he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.*

As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

so shall he "startle" (sprinkle) many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Behold My Servant. With the same opening words as the first song (42:1), Isaiah calls us to behold, to gaze, to contemplate the one called "The Servant." (52:13) We have been challenged to open our eyes and ears to see God's purpose to redeem us from sin fully accomplished in the substitutionary sacrifice of the Servant.

Exalted. The Servant has acted wisely, or accomplished his purpose, as Jesus says to the Father: "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." (John 17:4) As a result the Servant will be exalted, lifted high for all to behold God's glory. The song in Philippians 2 so beautifully describes the Exaltation of Jesus:

Christ Jesus emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

Startled Nations. Kings Shut their mouths. The nations are shocked and kings drop their jaws over the humiliation and disfigurement of the Servant. And on the other hand, they are rendered speechless that one who took the lowly place is now exalted at the very throne of God.

Isaiah 53:1-5 *Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by*

men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

The Arm of the Lord. The prophet's question, "*Who has believed what he has heard from us and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*" is troubling here and in John 12:38 where people did not believe in Jesus even though he had done many miracles. Isaiah's words come from a broken heart that people have not believed the message of salvation. This **man of sorrows** is rejected and overlooked as one who could set us free from sin. The truth is that the arm of God is not the expected mighty overwhelming weapon that crushes the enemy. (Isa 40:10) The power to take on the sin of the world is instead the suffering, humiliation and crushing of the Servant, as the sacrificial Lamb of God. As we saw in 50:4-9, the Servant suffers undeservedly because of human sin and as the delivering arm of the Lord, he will restore us to fellowship with God. "His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him." Ps 89:1

Crushed. "But surely" introduces the prophet's awareness that the crushing sacrifice of the Servant is personal. See the use of contrasting pronouns in verses 4-5 brought out in the Message Bible:

*He suffered, but it was we who sinned.
Our grief...he carried. Our pain...he bore.
He was pierced...for our rebellion.
He was crushed...for our iniquity.
Our punishment...was on him. His welts...healed us*

Pierced is a strong word used for violent and excruciating death, and crushed suggests breaking into pieces. And the wounds or bloody welts are from the lash to the back. The servant took the punishment so that by his wounds we are healed. This is what the Servant has done for us.

PRAY. Now go back and read these verses aloud as a personal prayer:

*Lord Jesus, you suffered, but it was I who sinned. My grief, you carried, my pain, you bore.
You were pierced for my rebellion. You were crushed for my iniquity, my punishment was on you. Your welts healed me. Lord, it was my sins that did that to you, that ripped and tore and crushed you—my sins! You took the punishment, and that made me whole."*

This Servant Song is one which you may want more time to sit alone with, praying for the Spirit to bring to your attention the truth and healing you need.

IMAGINE. *Visio Divina*. "Sacred seeing" is an ancient form of Christian prayer in which we allow our hearts and imaginations to enter into an image such as a Fujimura's "Sacrificial Grace." As you spend time looking at Fujimura's Sacrificial Grace, try to visualize the crushing of the precious stone that becomes the pigment which light transforms into beauty. Imagine a stone mortar or a molcajete that prepares spices by **crushing** and grinding them into a fine powder. Take a moment to see this process using all your senses. See the light coming through the broken stones. Smell the spice released in the crushing of seeds. See Jesus offering brokenness to bring healing. Sit in silence with the paintings and images.

PRAISE. Salt of the Sound, *Lamb of God*. <https://youtu.be/K5JLMjloG9s>

The Servant: Lamb of God

Friday Isaiah 53:6-12

The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.



Isaiah 53:6-12. All we like **sheep have gone astray**; we have turned—every one—to his own way and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of **us all**.⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a **lamb that is led to the slaughter**, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?
⁹ And they made his **grave with the wicked and with a rich man** in his death although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.¹⁰ **Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him**; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the **righteous one, my servant**, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Film depictions of the Biblical story are helpful visualizations to stir up prayerful imagination and bring us to the foot of the cross, the scene of the Righteous Servant's sacrifice. *The Passion of the Christ*, 2004, is a brutal, hard to watch version of the suffering and slaughter of Jesus, especially the long scene of his scourging with whips. Although we cannot fully imagine the suffering, the anguish, the pain, the sacrifice was real. By his stripes we are healed.

Sacrificial Lamb. Slaughtered for our sins. "Slaughter" is a horrific word that we really don't want to hear or see. Yet in his Revelations vision, John sees and describes both the glorified Lamb and the wounds of the slain lamb: "I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." (Revelations 5) And those with him sang a song of praise, *Worthy are you...for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language, and people and nation...*" All of us.

IMAGINE. Put yourself in this amazing royal scene at the throne room of God. The resurrected and glorified Jesus, the Lamb of God, is standing *“as though he had been slain.”* Can you see him? Jesus stands, yet still bears the marks, the wounds of the gruesome death he bore as sacrifice for sin. Yes, by his wounds we are healed. Approach Jesus the Lamb of God and touch his wounds. Show him your woundedness. Fall down and worship with all those present. Listen to the singing around the throne: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessings!” What blessings can you give to the Lamb who is worthy?

Stray Sheep. All of us. Isaiah introduces and closes verse 6 with “all of us.” ALL of us are stray sheep. Jesus died for the sins of ALL of us. We are compared to mindless, lost sheep who often are so focused on the clump of grass in front of them, that they fall off a cliff! As humans we want our own way, my way, including choices with bad eternal consequences. God has put all our foolish choices on the back of the Servant. How have you felt lost, or far away? The Servant Shepherd seeks your heart.

The Will of the Lord. God wanted all this to happen?! *“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him.”* The Servant’s suffering is monumental as it satisfies all our unpaid debts, debts we can never pay standing alone before a just God. The Servant’s sacrifice makes it possible for us to stand righteous before God. The crushing, though excruciating, is the process necessary for miraculous beauty and transformation. Our hearts of stone become flesh when we fall down, when we let go of pride and self, and we say, “Not my will, but yours.”

Repeat this as a prayer: “Not my will, but yours.”

Rich Man’s Grave. They made His grave with the wicked, but also with a rich man. Isaiah’s description parallels the burial of Jesus. Crucified as a criminal between two thieves, Jesus’ body would normally have been thrown in a common pit. But with the intervention of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, he was buried in a rich man’s garden tomb. (Matthew 27:57-60)

My Servant, The Righteous One. Isaiah did not know how perfectly his words would one day describe the day when the Messiah, the Suffering Servant Jesus Christ would in obedience offer his life as a sacrifice for all our iniquities and break the power of evil through righteousness. This King on a cross established God’s rule on earth, bringing forgiveness, peace, and healing to all.

REFLECT. We have meditated on five characteristics of the Servant in Isaiah. As you look at them again, which image has connected you more closely to Jesus as the Servant, Messiah, Lord?

Determined. Jesus set his face like a flint, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.

Chosen. “Behold my Servant...my Chosen in whom my soul delights.”

Beauty. “You are my Servant in whom I will display my Beauty.”

Awakens. “The Servant morning by morning awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.”

Crushed. “Behold my Servant...he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.”

Lamb of God “Like a lamb that is led to slaughter...my Servant will make many to be accounted as righteous.”

PRAISE. *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*, from a poem attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux

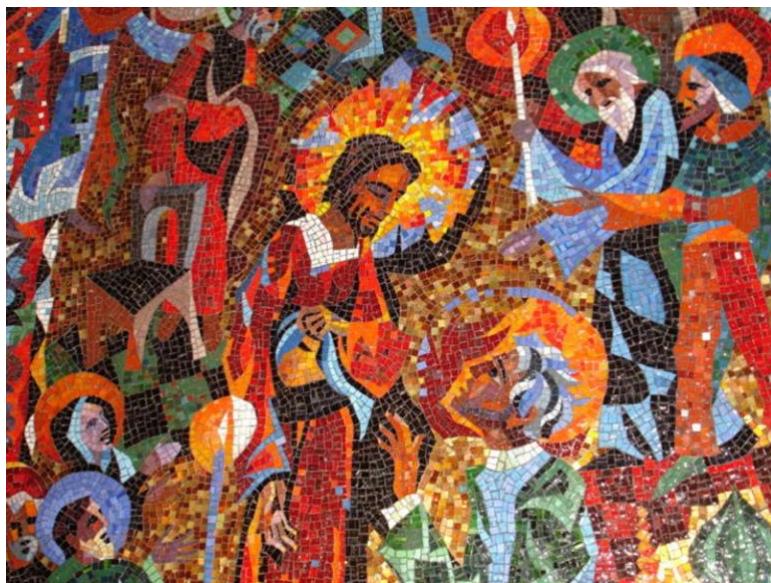
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Easter Sunday

Read John 20:19-31

Peace be with you.

"On the evening of that day (Easter Sunday), the first day of the week, the doors were locked where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews..." The evening of the greatest day in history, the followers of Jesus are locked in their homes, afraid to move, afraid of the authorities, and afraid of death. For the first time in years, they are alone. Jesus their teacher and master is gone.



They are uncertain, confused and trying to make sense of their last week with Jesus. It was a whirlwind of intensity starting with the victorious high of Jesus' entrance into the city and ending with the depths of despair at his torture and death. But now it is Sunday, Jesus has miraculously risen from the dead and reveals himself to his followers:

"...Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you. When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you." John 20:19-20

IMAGINE. Enter the scene of this room of waiting followers of Jesus. The air is musty from the locked doors and windows. Close quarters, irritable friends, waiting and waiting. Then suddenly Jesus. Standing. Front and center. Feel the surprise and wonder as you see him and hear him say to you: "Peace."

Peace spoken in words, not once but twice.

Peace shown, as he lifts his robe to reveal the wound in his pierced side and holds out his nail scarred hands.

Peace touched, as Jesus tells Thomas, *"Put your finger here, and see my hands, and put out your hand, and place it in my side."* Hear Thomas saying: *"My Lord and my God!"*

Now, see yourself coming up next to Thomas and Jesus. Reach out and touch the healed wounds in Jesus' hands. Put your finger in his pierced side. Look into his eyes of compassion. What does he say to you?

Then if you can, whisper your brokenness, the wound you feel, but leave untouched. As you are ready allow Jesus to see it. Let him touch you. Hear him say, "You are healed."

Share Good News. Philip, a disciple of Jesus was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 to the Ethiopian: *"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and as a lamb before his shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth."* The Ethiopian man wanted to know who Isaiah was talking about. Philip identified the Servant as Jesus and shared with him the Good News of the Gospel. Jesus Christ has risen today. Indeed, he has risen!

REFLECT. After the intensity of a global pandemic, political upheaval, and the limiting social distancing of family celebrations and online worship services, I have longed for peace and a new season of resurrected life and faith. During a few days of rest and celebration, I started asking God for a new focus and passion. It really was already within me after doing these meditations, and came out in the word: *Beauty*. The Spirit spoke it out again and again. I came across a prayer of St. Augustine in which he addresses God as *"O Beauty."* Immediately my eyes teared up and my heart was again drawn to Beauty. God displays his glory in Beauty and the Divine is Beauty. This prayer, this recognition of God's name in my heart, has renewed my "affections" for God. May it be so for you also.

Pray. *Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your Peace.* (Augustine. *Confessions.*)

How do you respond to such Beauty, to the One broken and poured out for you? What name of God has come up in your heart prayers?

BENEDICTION. As you celebrate this day with family and friends, hear these words:

Jesus suffered in silence, content to let God set things right. He used his servant body to carry our sins to the Cross so we could be rid of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing. You were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. You were a lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you are a beloved child cared for by the Shepherd of your soul.

GO IN PEACE



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My research, study, and reflection on The Servant Songs took me to a place of deep intimacy with Jesus the Servant through a new kinship with Isaiah the prophet. His words became images, scenes, and intimate connection. My desire is to open the Word of God in ways you can personally read and reflect, and follow spiritual practices that are sacred pathways to experiencing the presence of God. Of course, I would love your input and response because ultimately, I learn by sharing in community and hearing how you also flesh out living as a follower of Christ in adventurous obedience! Would you be willing to email your reflections to me?

I would be blessed.

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