

## SERMON FOR PALM SUNDAY, 2008

Lessons: Isaiah 50:4-9a, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 27: 11-66

Grace, peace and mercy be unto you from God our Father and from our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Into. The basis for our message this Palm Sunday weekend, this beginning of Holy/Passion Week, is our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 50. The Prophet Isaiah includes 4 Servant songs in his book of the Bible. Our text is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of those songs. Let's read, together, this Servant song of Isaiah :

**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 as flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates Me is near. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near to Me. Behold, the Lord God helps Me; who will declare Me guilty?**

A servant's entire identity is based upon the person he serves. Tho we don't have servants, so to speak, in Plainview, Mn. we do have employee, employer relationships. And in conversations with other people what is usually one of the first things people ask you: what do you do? where do you work? Who's your boss? Even if you say 'I'm self employed' that defines you. Your employment, your employer, your work, defines who you are in society. That's also true for servants in previous generations. A servant was defined by the master he served. A servant dressed in the uniform the master approved. A servant will act in the way the master expects. A servant even suffers the same fate as his master. If for example there's a financial set back for the master that set back affects the servant. A true servant is absolutely identified and connected to his master, his work, his purpose. That's what the Servant song of Isaiah 50 is portraying for us this Palm Sunday of Passion Week. God as Master desires and even demands a true servant. A servant who is obedient to all his mater's desires and demands. A true servant who will obey His Master's will even if it means total humiliation and death. And that true servant is Jesus Christ who serves not only the will of God but even more astoundingly He serves us with His grace and mercy and forgiveness. And that's what I want to talk to you about a little bit on this Palm Sunday week end.

### **God's and our, true Servant, in Jesus Christ!**

I. You and I are the complete opposite of the Servant Isaiah is singing about in our lesson. Isaiah sings about a servant that is not rebellious. But we're rebellious to God and others. Isaiah sings about a servant who does not turn back. But we easily turn backward from the Lord God our Master. 'Morning by morning' the servant Isaiah sings about willingly is taught. But, 'morning by morning' we rebel, we turnback from what God our Master teaches. God's Law, His 10 Commandments is what God teaches us 'morning by morning'. For example the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment 'Put God 1<sup>st</sup>', serve God, but do we? I'm not asking and God isn't asking 'do you try to put your Master, the Lord God, 1<sup>st</sup>'. Because obviously you are trying to put God 1<sup>st</sup>. You're here in church aren't you? That's trying to put God 1<sup>st</sup>, that's even trying to keep the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment 'honor God's name'. We're even trying to keep the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment 'remember the sabbath day'. We're trying to keep the entire 1<sup>st</sup> table of our Master's 10 Commandments. At least this morning we're trying. But, do we always and entirely and perfectly put God 1<sup>st</sup> in our lives? Not only try but actually accomplish it? No, I'm so easily turned backward to serving me, myself and I. I rebel against God's commandments when they reveal my failure.

**Matthew 5 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect'**

**1 Peter 1 'Just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written 'Be holy, because I am holy'.**

**James 4 'Anyone, then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins'**

How about the 2<sup>nd</sup> table of God's Law = serving others. Let's look briefly at a commandment of God which almost all of us would say I'm not guilty of rebelling or turn back from. Though in a very literal sense your Pastor has been in juvenile court accused of this commandment of God. The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment 'Do not murder'. Oh, maybe we haven't pulled a trigger or slit a throat. But how many times have you and I not stabbed someone in the back, blown them away, or've been tempted to think our lives would be better off without 'so and so' in it.

**Matthew 5 'You have heard 'Do not murder' but I tell you that anyone who is angry with another will be subject to God's judgement and the one who says 'you fool' is in danger of the fires of hell'.**

**1 John 3 'Anyone who hates his brother is already a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life'**

Haven't we all, even though we try not to, hated someone, become angry with someone, called or at least thought someone else to be a fool. And 'me, myself and I' so wise and smart.

We're servants all right, but we're servants by nature to sin. And our slavery to sin makes us whinny, complaining, even rebellious servants. Opportunities to serve God and to serve one another become chores to us and burdens to us. I have to go to church and keep the sabbath. Things we have to do but don't necessarily want to do willingly out of love. Our responsibilities as servants to family to friends to church to employers and our fellow employees are done but not

always done out of love and care but most always done out of obligation. That is living under our Master's commands but failing to keep them, perfectly.

**John 8 'Jesus said 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin'**

II. But, there is a true servant who never rebels against our Master, the Lord God. There is a true servant who never turns backward from what our Master, the Lord God, teaches us 'morning by morning'. And that true Servant is who Isaiah is singing about and with whom we join in on the chorus, so to speak, 'Hosanna loud Hossann'. The true servant of Isaiah's Servant Song is , Jesus!

Jesus, is perfectly and completely obedient to God's commands for us, vicariously. Jesus, serves us!

**Philippians 2 'Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men'.**

Jesus, set His face like flint meaning hard and focussed and determined. Jesus, as God's true servant passively, willingly, not rebelling, not out of obligation, not turning backward, for us, 'gives His back to those who strike it', gives 'His cheeks to those who pull out the beard', gives 'His face to those who spit in it'. Because His Master and ours, the Lord God, demanded, commanded this as the requirement for our disobedience, our rebellion, our back turning, our sin against His Law, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> table. Being God's true servant, Jesus, does what God demands as the payment for our rebellion, our disobedience for our not being able to do what our Master teaches us 'morning by morning'. Jesus , God's true servant is obedient even unto death, being crucified in our place. Jesus does what you and I continually fail to do in our rebellion and disobedience to God's Law. Jesus willingly and actively serves God, doing what we want and try to do but fail, Jesus puts God's will first. And Jesus willingly and actively serves us His neighbor by humbly substituting Himself for us 'to the point of death, even death on a cross'. Crying out what we deserve 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?', because we have so often forsaken God and forsaken others because we have forsaken all of God's commands to love Him and to love others above ourselves. What does God's true servant look like? A man riding a jack ass and to the world looking like one also. What does God's true servant look like? A weakened and bloody man, his back shredded by the whip, humiliated by the plucking one by one of hairs from His beard, cheeks and eyes dripping with spit. What does God's true servant look like? Seven inch spikes fixing Him to a cross, every breath lifting His chest pushing against those spikes, reopening the wounds on His back. Our word excruciating comes from the Latin meaning 'from the cross'. What does God's true servant look like? As part of the humiliation of the cross the victims were naked, really naked, not a tastefully placed white loincloth wrapped around their waste. We're usually not allowed to see Jesus naked because it may offend our sensitivities. But God's true servant looks like that, naked for all the world to see. That's how low our God would go to serve you as your substitute, your Savior.

III. And that perfect obedience of Jesus that perfect service to God and to us continues as Jesus serves us His grace and mercy and forgiveness in the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. As a humble servant Jesus' washes us and welcomes us 'not guilty' in the presence of our Master, the Lord God. Who could on account of our disobedience, our back turning, turn His back to us and send us to hell. Jesus, serves us His grace and mercy in the banquet of Holy Communion with His true body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins, all of them. When God in His justice could send us away from His presence spiritually starved and beggars and serving Satan in hell. Jesus serves us through His 'Divine Service' of worship with His Word, read and taught and preached and sung in our servant songs and hymns. Jesus serves us 'who are weary' of trying to keep God's commands and failing. Jesus serves us 'who are weary' the absolute confidence: "Who will declare me guilty? The Servant sings in Isaiah and we join in singing with Him. No one! No one, 'will declare me guilty'! We sing because Jesus has willingly vindicated you and me before our Master, our Lord God, by His life, by His suffering, by His death on the cross, by His resurrection on Easter.

**Philippians 2 '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, 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', our Master, our Lord God.**

Conclusion The true Servant of God is the one whom we cheer and sing about and wave our Palms as we begin this Holy Passion Week. The true Servant of God is the one who is riding upon a donkey into Jerusalem for one purpose – to willing serve God and to serve us disobedient rebellious servants of sin.

**John 15 Jesus says 'Love each other as I have loved you ... I no longer call you servants ... instead I call you friends ... you did not chose Me but I chose you ... if the world hates you, keep in mind it hated Me first ... remember these words I have spoken to you 'No servant is greater than his master'.**

The true Servant of God, Jesus, is the one who calls us sinners His friends. There is no greater Servant than that, 'Hosanna, loud Hosanna'!

And now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, our Suffering Servant. Amen