

Sermon for October 20, 2024
Proper 24B
22nd Sunday after Pentecost
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Isaiah 53: 4-12
Psalm 91:9-16
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 10:35-45

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
because he poured out himself to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Who is the Prophet Isaiah talking about?

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A moment for theological reflection about the texts
When we read scripture there basically are two methods
used to interpret scripture: exegesis and eisegesis.
Exegesis is the critical interpretation or explanation of a text
This often involves analyzing the text in its original language,
and considering the context in which it was written.

Eisegesis is the practice of interpreting a text by inserting one's own ideas, biases, or agendas
into it.

It's also known as "reading into" the text.

So, the context for Isaiah:

This section of Isaiah is called Deutero-Isaiah, or second Isaiah.

The author was living in Babylon
as part of the generation after the Babylonian exile

and just before the return to Judea.
The prophet is writing about the nation of Israel,
which took its name from Jacob
who was renamed Isaiah after wrestling with God.

Exegetically, the text is talking about
the suffering of the nation of Israel
– conquered by Babylon and suffering in exile

Eisegetically: the “who” of the text is the Messiah, the Christ.
The writings of prophet Isaiah are often considered the Fifth Gospel because our Christian
tradition reads back into the Hebrew scriptures as foretelling the coming of the Christ
and is considered proven because – well, here we are.

We are who we are, and I stand before you
to preach the Good News of the Gospel.

And today, the Gospel is a bit startling.

James and John, the sons of Zebedee,
who Jesus called “the sons of Thunder,”
cozy up to their teachers and off-handedly request:
“We want to have seats at your right hand and left hand.”
Jesus ably handles the situation.
“That’s not for me to grant, and besides,
can you handle what I have to do?
It won’t be easy.”

The boys, of course, are all too certain of their own abilities.
“Then Jesus said to them,
‘The cup that I drink you will drink;
and with the baptism with which I am baptized,
you will be baptized.’”

James and John were among the first
called to be the twelve Disciples who followed Jesus.
After the crucifixion and resurrection and Pentecost
they became Apostles,
those who were sent by Jesus into the world
to build the Kingdom of God.

James went out to the mission field from Jerusalem
and made his way all the way to Spain to preach the word of God.
He did not do all that well initially,
and in fact he was intending to give it up and return to Jerusalem.
On the road the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was still living,
appeared to him standing on a pillar,
and told him to build the church.
And he remained for about four years before returning to Judea.

In Judea James continued to preach the word of God, which did not earn him credit with the King, Herod Agrippa I, who ordered the apostle's execution – beheading by the sword. The martyrdom of James is the only one of the Apostles recorded in the New Testament.

The disciples of James returned his body to Iberia to be buried in what would become the Church of Santiago de Compostela. Santiago being St. James in Spanish.

John on the other hand remained in Jerusalem and is reported in the New Testament working with Peter and others in spreading the word through Jerusalem and Judea.

We believe John to be “the beloved disciple” mentioned in the Gospel of John, which bears his name.

That being the case, Jesus commended his mother to John's care from the Cross.

Reportedly he was beaten on occasion and eventually migrated north with Mary and others to what is now Turkey, settled in Ephesus, and established the church there.

It was in Ephesus that the Gospel of John was believed to have been written.

The Church in Ephesus was built on the foundations of the Temple to Artemis, the Greek goddess of the Hunt. The Temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

It was in that Church that the Council of Ephesus declared Mary to be the Theotokos – the God-Bearer. John is the only disciple who lived a long life and died of old age, the last of the first Apostles.

Apostle is the root of what we term the Apostolic Succession.

Jesus laid hands on the Apostles and the Apostles laid hands on those who followed them, and they laid hands on those that followed them, and on it goes for two thousand years.

We have all had hands laid on us that were touched in the succession from Jesus himself, and declared ministers of the Gospel.

You see, we in the Episcopal Church are all ministers.

Bishops, Priests, Deacons and Laity.

In fact, the Laity are the first among God's ministers on Earth.

Then comes Bishops, Priests, Deacons.

Ordination does not set the ordained above the Laity.

Ordination merely sets apart the ordained for specific ministries.
We are all called to serve God.

Too often our egos get in the way.
Just like with James and John.
Ambition among the disciples seems out of place,
and poses the question for us:
How do we serve the world and the Kingdom of God?
Too often we want to be the boss of us all,
and that is the problem.
It was a problem for the ten other disciples
when they heard what James and John were up to.

“So Jesus called them and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”

We are all called to serve as ministers of God.
We are called to clothe the naked, feed the hungry,
shelter the homeless, heal the sick, visit the prisoner,
welcome the stranger in the land.
We are called. As it says in today’s collect:

“Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name... Amen