

A Different Kind of Savior

Isaiah 53:1-3

Sunday, March 10, 2019

First Sunday in Lent

Most of us want leaders that are well connected, savvy, well spoken and clever enough to work the angles. It is also the case that we want them to be somewhat pleasant looking, so as not to bring attention to their form, instead of their speech. It is said that Caesar was not only a great orator but was a beautiful man. The same can be said of Pericles, Alexander the Great, and John Kennedy. This, of course, does not detract from their leadership, but it didn't hurt either. David was also a good-looking man, along with Saul and even Solomon. It doesn't hurt, either, that they were descendants of well-respected families. You might even say that they were a part of dynasties of significant community leaders. They are leaders that the people count on during times of trouble and times of hope. They know what to do because they are connected to the strategies of power, therefore the hope of this world. The world's saviors fall into these categories of power and hope. But for those that speak on behalf of God, the categories that establish leadership are quite different. They are often people that speak the truth and engage the world with a determined message that reaches the core, rather than to the necessities of congruence.

The voice of Isaiah shouts out to the world that God is sending a leader who is outside the norm, but will be a suitable compatriot to God's own presence in the world. In fact, this person, that no one wants and actually despises, will be a suitable savior for the world. He is like many in this world who suffer under the banner of power, yet does not rise up against it, but finds a way to help others resist, being a victim himself of the steam-roller of power. Isaiah describes a person that is a part of the scandal of the community. It is someone that no one is willing to comfort, someone who is ugly and someone that has nothing to offer except his own gift of grace and suffering for others, without complaint. As Isaiah says, "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." But how does this kind of leader become a savior?

While Isaiah describes Israel's and the world's savior through physical descriptions and activities that are anything but attractive, he also informs us of the heart of this person. This disfigured person is not defeated by the powers of the world, instead he conquers them by his

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While Isaiah describes Israel's and the world's savior through physical descriptions and activities that are anything but attractive, he also informs us of the heart of this person. This disfigured person is not defeated by the powers of the world, instead he conquers them by his

willingness to take on their sin of brutality. God piles upon this person the sins of the world-----not to judge them or to punish their wrong doer, but to show them what their sins can do to others. Therefore, he takes upon himself the sins of the world to expose them, diminish the desire of others to commit sins and to shame all who have cruelly treated him and others. This savior is a lightning rod to justice, mercy, and love among the community of sinners.

Paul says, "He was made to be sin for our sake." What he means is that Jesus allowed himself to be called a "sinner" and "outcast" for our sake. For by doing this he exposes the evil of the world. In other words, he is a scapegoat for those that are the victims of power. In the tradition of the Greeks, primitive societies and even today, Jesus as the scapegoat is both tragic and holy. He raises our hopes, but at the same time we shower him with pity. In this relationship of love and mercy he becomes the healing power of communities and nations. The closest image we have of this kind of person, in the last 400 years, is King Lear. He was both to be pitied in his tragic situation, but he was also a glaring light of truth to his friends and subjects. In his death and suffering, he left behind a passion for mercy.

It is not always the case that those who achieve a certain kind of powerful position in the world are the ones to help us. Isaiah is asking Israel through the telling of the "suffering servant" that this is the person you should follow. You should jump into his world and follow his example. This is the way that the world will be healed of its pain. By taking on the pain of others we share together our humanity and in that we find peace and solace.

With this image of the world's savior, Isaiah changes the perception of religion from one of power and ritual to hospitality, humility and forgiveness. Salvation does not come by offering sacrifices in a temple, but through the simple vortex of human compassion and courage to carry each other's burdens. When we read the stories of Jesus, Isaiah's image of the "suffering servant" permeates the pages. Jesus is the victim of the establishment of his day, but he does not retaliate in like kind. Instead, he takes on their sins, bringing them before the world so that all can see. Everything is illuminated while he hangs on the cross. The sins of the world are there as the world looks on. What we see is a man who is oppressed, like a lamb to the slaughter, yet he does not condemn, instead he remains silent until he says to everyone, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

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