

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Good Friday  
Friday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

**Sermon:** The Gospel according to Isaiah

**Texts:** Isaiah 52:13–53:12

**Focus:** Jesus is the Suffering Servant who bore our sin.

**Function:** That they would never doubt Christ's friendship and love for them.

**Structure:** Text-Application

**Locus:** "I believe that Jesus Christ... has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person..., not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death..." (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles' Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. It is no accident that the Early Church Fathers sometimes referred to the Book of Isaiah as the "fifth Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Isaiah's prophecy is replete with so many references to Jesus the Messiah, that one can hardly come away from a reading of it without thinking of Christ. There is the virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14. Jesus' healing ministry is outlined in Isaiah 35. Some of Isaiah's words Jesus directly applied to himself, such as Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus used to begin his infamous "Nazareth Manifesto" (Luke 4:18-19).

And then there is today's reading, the third Servant Song, the Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). This passage of Scripture describes Christ's crucifixion in such detail that one might be reading the Passion account from any of the Four Gospels. Thus, we have before us today, the Passion of the Christ from the Gospel according to Isaiah. And yet we can picture the prophet viewing the crucifixion through a telescope that doesn't fully focus. As he strains to view this event 700 years after his own time, Isaiah sees the outline of what is happening but not the sharp edges. There are no soldiers or nails in Isaiah's gospel. The cross

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/the-fifth-gospel-why-isaiah-matters/>

itself is not mentioned explicitly, although there is a hint: “Behold, my servant... shall be high and lifted up...” (Isa. 52:13). Nor do we have the beautiful mention of Jesus’ name. But the scene is still before us.

At Jesus’ trials before the Jewish priests and Roman governor, he repeatedly refused to speak anything in his own defense. “Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7). The only times Jesus said anything were when he was asked a direct question: “Are you the Son of God?” (Luke 22:70). “Are you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33). During his trials and journey to the cross, people mocked him, spit on him, and demanded his death. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3a). Did anyone else ever suffer like Jesus? No, and nobody could.

In the Gospel according to Isaiah, Jesus the Suffering Servant appears beaten, battered, and bruised. “His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance... and as one from whom men hide their faces...” (Isa. 52:14; 53:3, ESV).<sup>2</sup> After the Roman soldiers flogged Jesus with the cat o’ nine tails, a whip comprised of leather cords with razor sharp rocks and pieces of broken glass tied to them, his back was shredded to ribbons. His face was red and puffy from the beatings received in the high priest’s house. He struggled to see through swollen eyes as blood dripped into his face from the crown of thorns. He was not a pretty picture. “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa. 53:2). If anyone had any hopes on Palm Sunday that Jesus would be Israel’s Messiah and King of the Jews, one glance at Jesus on Good Friday would be enough to remove any thought of that.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was crucified between two criminals, two thieves or malefactors. He “was numbered with the transgressors,” and yet he also “makes intercession for

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<sup>2</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12), such as when he looked down from the cross upon his enemies and prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Among those for whom he prayed were the Roman soldiers gambling for his garments. “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” (Isa. 53:12).

Yet the Suffering Servant did more than suffer: He also died. “He poured out his soul to death” (Isa. 53:12). Joseph of Arimathea was a man of means and a disciple of Jesus—but in secret, for fear of the Jewish authorities. Yet after Jesus gasped his last upon the cross, Joseph plucked up enough courage to go and ask Pilate for the body (John 19:38ff). Permission granted. Joseph and Nicodemus (another secret disciple) took Jesus’ body and laid it in a newly dug tomb near Golgotha. It was Joseph’s own tomb (Matt. 27:57ff). “And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death...” (Isa. 53:9). They anointed Jesus’ body with spices, according to the Jewish burial custom of embalming, and then they sealed the entrance to the tomb. The rest of the story must wait for Sunday.

Yet Isaiah gives us much more than the gory details of Jesus’ suffering and death. He also speaks to the *purpose* of Christ’s Passion. Everything he did was to accomplish our salvation. Jesus died in our place and received the death punishment that *we* deserve:

“But he was wounded for our transgressions;  
 he was crushed for our iniquities;  
 upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
 and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).

The wounds that Jesus endured and bore upon the cross were the punishment for our sin—not his. He carried our sin to the cross—“and he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

Jesus is the only Innocent man who ever lived. But “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6). He carried our sin and paid our debt—a debt we could never repay ourselves. “It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief” (Isa. 53:10).

And yet Jesus' suffering and death were not in vain. He *did* accomplish our salvation. His sacrifice was a sin offering to remove our guilt (Isa. 53:10). By his death, he brought life to all who believe in his name. We are justified through his blood. "By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous..." (Isa. 53:11). Here Isaiah takes a page from Paul, who writes, "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18).

All this is recorded in the Gospel according to Isaiah, an Old Testament book of prophecy written 700 years before Christ came. All this is what we remember on this Friday we call "good." Because Christ had your highest good in mind when he suffered and died *for you*.

On this side of history, from our vantage point looking back at the cross, we have the joy and privilege of knowing that the story isn't over yet. There is still the empty tomb. There is still new life and resurrection and new creation. Even that is recorded in Isaiah: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isa. 65:17). But that is a story for a different Day. In the name of Jesus, the Suffering Servant. Amen.