Holy Week 2022 (St. Louis)

**By His Wounds We Are Healed**

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

KV 53:5. **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

“All human life is determined by suffering for others” (“Alles menschliche Leben ist durch Stellvertretung bestimmt”), said D. Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was executed by the German Nazi. You and I are here today because of someone’s sacrifice on our behalf. Children grow through their parents’ silent sacrifice, and sheep grow through the shepherd's invisible prayer. Fundamentally, Christian discipleship is about participating in Christ’s suffering for others.

Today's passage is a song about the Lord's Servant that remarkably describes the work of Jesus. It is perhaps the most surprising passage in the Old Testament, prophesied 700 before the coming of Jesus. Reformer Martin Luther emphasized that Isaiah 53 is a passage that believers should memorize. As the English preacher Spurgeon said, “Here is the essence of the gospel, and here is the entire Bible condensed.”

The Servant song can be divided into five sets of three verses (52:13-15, 53:1-3; 4-6; 7-9; 10-12). The first set is Isa 52:13-15, which introduces God's servant and his ministry. There, the Messiah is portrayed as being raised, lifted up and highly exalted. But many are appalled at him, because his appearance was so disfigured beyond any human being. And the nations are astonished and shut their mouths because of him. It’s because they see and learn things they have never heard before. This surprising news is the gospel of Jesus delivered by the prophet Isaiah. If we can meditate on this song over and over again, the power of the gospel will cover our lives. My prayer is that we may encounter Jesus anew who took upon himself our sins to give us peace and healing. Let’s meditate on Isaiah 53 in four parts.

**1. The despised Servant**

The first surprise is that the Messiah became a despised servant. In the first half of the book of Isaiah, the prophet was discouraged by the proud and disobedient people. He was deeply disappointed by those who did not come to their senses even after being struck by God. God could have judged and put an end to those who turned to their evil ways. But God did something different. He promised us a savior.

The prophet asks in verse 1, **“Who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”** It implies that no one believed. The arm of God refers to the power and salvation of God. What do we expect when God's saving power is revealed? You can see it in superhero movies. People expect a powerful invincible hero who can destroy enemies at once. But look at verse 2a, **“He grew up before the LORD like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.”** The expression “tender shoot” here doesn't mean it's soft or adorable, but rather, carries the meaning of being weak and pitiful.

Typically the world judges people by their outward appearance. Many people would love to look like world-famous celebrities. Many online influencers are good looking and present sought-after lifestyles, set fashion trends, and flaunt their money and exclusive social circles; people want to create a “picture-perfect” image on social media. Company representatives and government spokesmen usually are good-looking people. People small in stature like me are usually not so popular. But look at the Savior God sent for us. 2b, **“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”**

This suffering Servant did not have human credentials which could attract people to him. He did not come to the royal palace that a king would deserve. He was born in a shabby stable where smelly animals lived. Jesus grew up in the despised village of Nazareth in Galilee, and took the job of a carpenter working on a construction site. He had no doctoral titles to claim, neither did he hold position nor power.

Instead, this Messiah was despised and rejected by mankind (3). He became **“a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.”** Jesus was stigmatized as a friend of sinners because he associated himself with sinners and social outcasts. This Servant chose the path of contempt, which no one wants to take or even look at. Who on earth wants to be ridiculed, ignored and abandoned? Everyone, including Jesus’ disciples, wanted to avoid such a path. But Jesus was there. We tend to look away when we see something horrible and embarrassing. Jesus was treated like that. If this suffering Servant would come to us today, would we ever recognize Him? Do you think Jesus would appear before you in a gorgeous appearance like how he is portrayed in many famous paintings? What if he didn't have any human beauty, titles, fame, or power? Our proud eyes despised him and turned our faces away from him. The Savior truly became a man of sorrow, and familiar with pain.

Each person has their own problems that they are struggling with physically and mentally. It is difficult for us to understand others because we are naturally self-centered. In fact, we cannot understand others’ suffering unless we have experienced the same agony and sorrow. We feel lonely and sad when we are not understood. I saw many people comforted at the UBF global Forum, especially when people shared their struggles with disabilities and trials that their children were living through. Here, Jesus is called “a man of suffering, familiar with pain." Jesus went through not just one sorrow, but all kinds of sorrows. Will you ignore this man of suffering and turn your face away from him? The power of God is revealed in our weakness. God's weakness is stronger than human strength. The contempt of Jesus is more glorious than worldly glory. Why so? It’s because he is our merciful High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses; he can help us in our time of need (Heb 2). Amen

**2. The Servant bore our suffering and our iniquities.**

Here's something that surprises us even more. Far from bringing the justice and salvation people desired, the Messiah has become a victim of injustice. Verse 5 says he was pierced and killed through brutal violence. As the soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus' head, a thick thorn pierced his head. When people tortured Jesus on the cross, nails pierced him mercilessly, crushing his hands and feet. This is a sheer act of barbarism that is unimaginable. And when the spear pierced his side, blood and water gushed out. When we see the cross, we often think of it as a mere symbol or decor without much thought. But the cross was originally a horrible and dreadful murder weapon that people dreaded talking about. The cross was a symbol of shame, pain, fear and death. When we see someone suffering, we usually think that they get what they deserve. So, people considered the suffering Servant punished by God and stricken by him. We cannot see this Messiah if our eyes are fixed on earthly comfort and glory.

But why did Jesus have to suffer so much pain and sorrow? The word “surely” in verse 4 emphatically reveals the truth. Look at the pronouns in verses 4-6. “He” and “we” are repeated over and over again. He-us, he-us, he-us... Everything he suffered was what we had to suffer. His sufferings were ours, and his sorrows were ours.

Verse 6 says, **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.”** You, me, and all of us, without exception, each has turned to our own way of life. We were like ignorant, stubborn, and hopeless sheep. Sin means to live without acknowledging God, the Creator, as God. Even at this moment, we’re breathing God's air, drinking God's water, and living the life God has given; but it is a great sin to live a selfish life saying that my life is mine. It is a sin to live pridefully, seeking human glory. It is sin to live according to the lusts of the flesh. In this evil age, human thoughts become futile and do not regard sin as sin. But if sin is not regarded as a sin, only destruction remains.

Sin is much more serious than we think. If sin was like COVID that can be prevented with a mask or a vaccine, there would be no problem. The whole world has been struggling with the coronavirus; (in the USA, the mortality rate among those infected is said to be about 1.2 percent.) But the death rate as a result of sin is 100 percent. No matter the background, a despised publican, prostitute, or a noble-looking Pharisee, are all sinners alike.

We feel hurt when we are criticized or blamed. But when one missionary was blamed, he would say, "You really don't know me. I am a worse person than you say.” What about us? How do we perceive ourselves? As a pastor put it, “You are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope.” (Tim Keller). Look at the cross of Jesus. Our violent words crushed him, and our ignorance hated him, and our pride crucified the Son of God. Sin and its consequences never simply go away. The result is judgment and death.

Look at verses 5-6. **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities (5). He bore our punishment that we deserved. How could this be? Verse 5 compares our iniquities to diseases. Of course, sin is far more serious than disease. No physician can cure the disease of sin. Because sin is a deliberate crime, it requires punishment, not a cure. But why the word healing? Here is the intention of the merciful God revealed. A merciful God took upon himself the sins of us all. Why? It's because of love. God loves us and gave His beloved Son for our sins (1 John 4:10). God has laid on him the iniquity of us all (6).

So what's the result? Verse 5b: **“The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** We cannot wash away sin by taking a shower; even if we exercise hard, or practice asceticism, or participate in good deeds, the sin problem cannot not be solved. But Jesus shed his blood and bore the weight of all our sins. The blood of Jesus has the power to forgive. Now, when we are washed in that blood of Jesus, we have peace.

Jesus is the Physician who heals our souls. Since the pandemic, many people, especially the young, have been suffering from depression, anxiety, and mental health; it is said that over 80 percent of young adults are struggling with anxiety. Where can we go when our souls are sick and weary? We must go to Jesus. Jesus is the Physician of our souls; he is the wounded healer. His precious blood is the heavenly cure. With infinite mercy, the Lord treats the wounds of our sins and heals us with His blood. No matter what terrible sin we may have, Jesus can heal us.

Many of us here have experienced this grace of healing. I know a person who came to believe in Jesus after wandering in the world, but there was still no peace because of the unresolved wounds of past sins. In her anguish when she was praying, in her vision the Lord gave her a whip, telling her to strike himself until her hatred and anger towards the person who hurt her vanished, and she reflexively did so. It was then that she truly met the Lord who was stricken and wounded for us.

Now, you don't have to search the world for other answers. Punishment belongs to Jesus, and peace is ours. The wounds belong to Jesus, and the healing is ours. A marvelous exchange took place. You are much more loved than you ever imagined. Because Jesus paid the price for all our iniquities, you are absolutely loved. Amen! The life of faith is about meeting the Lord of the cross every day, receiving his peace and healing. Because of Jesus, we can overcome the world and be happy despite many difficulties.

**3. The suffering Servant did not open his mouth like a silent sheep**

Something surprising is that Jesus willingly gave up his life. Verse 7. **“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.”** Unlike the foolish sheep in verse 6 who went their own way, the lamb in verse 7 was oppressed and afflicted, but did not open his mouth. It is a shocking injustice if the innocent are punished in our human world. We feel angry when innocent people are accused and sacrificed. Who on earth wants to be unfairly humiliated and dragged to death? It is our nature to actively defend ourselves. When Jesus was arrested, Peter tried to resist by force. Jesus could have immediately sent more than twelve legions (72,000) of angels to destroy his enemies, but he did not. Jesus was silent before the Jewish religious court, and he was also silent before a Gentile court. If you remain silent without defending yourself in a Roman court, you will be treated as pleading guilty. But Jesus was silent before wrong accusations. Eventually, he was taken to the cross and was crucified. What an insulting moment, when, like the chief of sinners, he was nailed to the cross in front of the whole world. The world ridiculed him, “If you are the savior, save yourself first. If you are the Son of God, then come down from the cross and prove yourself.” But the suffering Servant was not like a roaring lion; he was like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers.

Why did Jesus choose to go this way of suffering? It's not that he lacked power. It is not that Jesus was forced because his arm was twisted. No. He prayed, “Father, Not my will, but yours be done,” and he completely obeyed the Father’s will. Jesus had the power to lay his life down and the power to take it again. But he willingly gave up his life (John 10:18). Why? It's because of love. It is like parents who are willing to sacrifice for their children. Although no one acknowledged it, Jesus left everything to God his Father and was cut off from the land of the living (8). Our Savior willingly and completely gave his life for us. Amen.

**4. The suffering Servant triumphed for us**

The song of the suffering Servant does not end with suffering and death, but with a surprising twist. The last stanza 10-12 sings the ultimate triumph of the suffering Servant. His end is victory and its fruits. See v10. **“Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”**

God's will is clearly revealed here. Who nailed Jesus to the cross? The sufferings of Jesus were not accidental, nor was he merely a victim of an unjust world. The suffering of Jesus was God's will for you and me. God made his life an offering for sin (10). In the Old Testament, only animals were allowed as sacrifices, and human sacrifices were absolutely forbidden. But the Son of God Himself became the sacrifice in our place. Here Jesus is not the victim of the world, but He is the Victor. Verse 10b says, “**He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.”** God raised Jesus from the dead. And he received his portion with the great (12). This proclaims that Jesus ascended to heaven and triumphed forever. Amen.

You and I are the fruits of Jesus' life-giving sacrifice and victory. Jesus justifies you and me even now through his life-giving knowledge (11). This knowledge is the experiential knowledge of Jesus who took our sufferings and bore our iniquities. This knowledge is the gospel of the cross. When you believe in Jesus, your sins become his and his righteousness becomes yours. When you believe in Jesus, your broken life will be healed and made whole.

Before I met Jesus, I took pride in studying philosophy in pursuit of wisdom. But my soul was full of darkness. I sought the approval of people rather than truth. Often I felt insecure due to my small stature, and I lived as a miserable slave to the lusts of the flesh. My heart was full of rebellion against God, and I thought that God was like a dictator. I hid my shameful sins and promised myself to take my darkness to my grave. Then, through Bible study and conferences, I heard Jesus in his excruciating pain praying for his enemies: “Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). It hit me strongly that God was on the cross.

(Based Isaiah 53), when I confessed all my sins to the Lord, His forgiveness came upon me, and the powerful love of God overwhelmed my heart. Jesus was enough. No other external conditions were needed. I decided to give my life to the Lord, and after that, the Lord became my good shepherd who has led my life on the path of righteousness. As a missionary, I experienced great and small things, but the greatest blessing is knowing Jesus. I was very egocentric, and there was still stubbornness and rebellion that would resurface periodically. But the more I got to know Jesus, the more the Lord's endless mercy covered my life. The more I know the love of Jesus, who died for me, the more I receive healing from my sin-sickness. I exalt the name of the Lord who restores my life beautifully.

Has anyone here ever died for anyone else? Someone died for you. It is Jesus. This is great news. Jesus, the perfect God and perfect man, took away all our sins. Here is forgiveness and peace. Here is healing and restoration. Sin can no longer reign over us. It’s because the Lord died for our sins and rose again for our righteousness. Have you received peace and healing? Let us exalt him and praise him.

Are you still suffering from the wounds of sin? Are you doubting? Sin is never logically explained or resolved. Come, look at the wounds of Jesus and believe in the power of his blood! Amen! From the throne of the slain Lamb a river of mercy flows constantly. Amen. Come to Jesus and surrender yourself to his precious blood. **“The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”** (5) The risen Lord has become the eternal Priest who intercedes for us (12). This is the best news in the world. This is the good news of Jesus that we must enjoy and live out every day.

May we all receive peace and healing through Jesus’ blood every day. I pray that we can love each other through the power of Jesus’ love. I pray that the love of Jesus will flow to many young souls here in St. Louis. May the peace and healing of the Lord be with those suffering due to the war in Ukraine. Compelled by the love of the Lord, may the St. Louis UBF community continue to pray for young people, this nation, and the world. Amen