

LENT ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

Isaiah Sees Christ's Sorrow

Isaiah 53:1-3

TEXT: *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

It's frustrating to Christians to see so many people who do not believe. The frustration often grows to the point where we may wonder what it is that we are doing wrong as a church. "Why don't people fill our churches to the capacity for which we have designed them?" Look at this beautiful structure, dedicated to the ministry of the Gospel. If each pew at St. John's had 12 people sitting in it, and all 36 pews were so filled, we could serve 432 people. Yet Sunday after Sunday 2 thirds of our pews are empty.

This is what saddened Jesus whose ministry was, from human standards, a most horrific failure. Jesus is God and during the three years of his ministry his perfect Law and Gospel preaching turned thousands away. Even though there were many who did believe and who followed him, in the end, even his "church council" denied and forsook him.

Is this a fair comparison? Jesus' ministry to ours? Why not? Jesus used the very same means of producing saving faith that was used centuries before he was born, and the very same means of producing saving faith that he has instructed us to use, namely, THE GOSPEL IN WORD AND SACRAMENT.

But be prepared for sadness and disappointment, for as Isaiah prophesied 8 centuries before Jesus was on earth, very few will believe our message. Isaiah's Lenten prophecy prepared Jesus for this sorrow, because to reject God's word is to reject Jesus. And, Jesus wept over those who did not believe God's Word.

Isaiah wrote: *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* The "arm of the Lord." What is that? Not great armies, although God used armies to destroy the ungodly. Recall Joshua and the Battle of Jericho? The "arm of the Lord." It's not the mighty miracles he often worked before the eyes of the world, like when God saved Israel and destroyed the ungodly Pharaoh by parting the Red Sea. But the "arm of the Lord" of which Isaiah speaks works among us today with the gentle pouring of water. Did you see what the "arm of the Lord" did here this morning? It reached down to this location and touched the head of a dead baby. Not physically dead, but spiritually dead. We cannot see faith, but Scripture says that by the washing of Holy Baptism, saving faith is created and delivers us from spiritual death that is our condition from the moment of conception and raises us to spiritual life. Jesus said it so clearly: *I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.* Jn 3

The "arm of the Lord" has been revealed to you, and today we witness a family whose parents offer Jesus and all his Church the highest joy! There is no sorrow here, but great rejoicing in the Kingdom of Heaven, for another soul has been washed clean from the curse of sin and the Holy Spirit has created the faith that is required to believe in Jesus. This is no pretty little ceremony, but a great miracle that God promises to perform and does perform through this simple act of baptism!

Yet there are so many who do not believe this Word of God and by that unbelief they reject Jesus. The sorrow that fills the heart of our Lord over those who reject him is the greatest sorrow as Isaiah prophesied: *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.* Jesus would be a man of sorrows and he would be familiar with suffering. He would suffer and sorrow, not for any sin of his own, for Scripture reveals that Jesus was sinless. He was on earth and still is in heaven the Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer. Nevertheless, he would redeem all mankind, even those who, as Isaiah says, would not desire him or want him. Isaiah writes: *He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.*

Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. He died for their sins as well, even though they would not want him.

To reject God's Word is the greatest sorrow of all for our Lord. To reject the forgiveness of sins which Jesus paid for with his own suffering and death cuts deeply into the heart of God. To despise and turn away from the gentle cool water of Baptism, that sacred act that God's Word says brings the Holy Spirit to hearts and souls to give us faith and rebirth, is a great sorrow, and to not see that he is truly present in the bread and wine that he has given us to eat and to drink for our forgiveness is a great distress to our Lord.

Instead of requiring any kind of work from us, Jesus does it all FOR us. Yet Isaiah joins in with the sorrow of God and declares: ***Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*** To whom as the arm of the Lord been revealed? It has been revealed to us. May none of us cause our Lord to weep over us!

Why would an Almighty God work through mere words? The world wants more than words. Wouldn't it make the spread of the Gospel more effective if God would have used lightning to destroy Satan? Wouldn't be more effective if God would give us all a little peek at what hell looks like, and what heaven looks like? Jesus spoke of a man who was in hell, while there was a poor man named Lazarus who was in heaven. The man in hell argued this point. Jesus tells us: ***In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ... I beg you, father (Abraham), send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'*** "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" Lu 16 A miraculous appearance by Lazarus would convince them! So our sinful natures think. Oh yes, the message of a crucified and risen Jesus is true, but we have to do something to get their attention!

Why would an Almighty God work through words? And weak words at that! By "weak words" I mean that there is no great word of God commanding any of us to do some great thing. Instead, it is as Paul writes: ***For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** 1 Co 1 What could testify more to his almighty power than his word? And what would testify more of one's faith than to believe, not acts of power, but his word?

In regard to the Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Martin Luther writes: "**How can water do such great things? And, how can eating and drinking do such great things?**" Answer: **It is not the water, or the eating and drinking, BUT THE WORD OF GOD.** Speaking of Jesus, John writes: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*** Jn 1 One day Jesus, The Word Made Flesh, sat on a hill overlooking Jerusalem and wept, for in a few days these people to whom Isaiah's prophesy of a sorrowing Savior had been given, would reject him and crucify him.

May none of us ever cause our Lord to weep. Let us learn from this ancient prophesy of our Lord's prophet to cherish the simple words of what God has done for us in Jesus' death and resurrection. Let us learn to cherish our baptism and that of our children and grandchildren. Let us learn to cherish the amazing miracle of the Lord's Supper by which the Holy Spirit preserves and keeps us in the one true faith unto life everlasting!

Then know that Jesus who is with us always is looking upon you with his favor and a joyous heart!
Amen.