

Sermon: 2019/04/19 ("Good Friday") - *Isaiah 52:13-53:12 & Luke 22:66-23:47_BTR*

The *Book of Isaiah*, sometimes, *deservedly*, called "*The Fifth Gospel*," was written approximately *seven(!)* centuries before the events of "Holy Week."

We know this - "approximately" - because the prophet tells us in the opening verse of chapter one that he had his visions 'in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah' - that was the remaining [Bronze Age] southern kingdom after the Assyrian invasion, and they - "the Assyrians" - left behind detailed chronologies of their various battles and victories: they carved them into stone, which is, of course, a very durable material, and many of these tablets have been found by archaeologists.

Now, Isaiah's prediction about the torture and persecution of the Messiah - that's the material we just heard - is from the fifty-second and fifty-third chapters, which are almost at the very end of the book, suggesting that their contents were seen toward the end of his (long) life, let's say during Hezekiah's brief monarchy, which ended in 686 B. C., or perhaps a little after.

And so what is *remarkable* is how important that *very* ancient text - The Book of Isaiah - remote from the time-period it accurately describes - is to constructing a *correct* theology of Christ's crucifixion; which, initially, threw the earliest Church - *The Twelve* - into *utter* confusion.

Now, naturally - or, rather, *super*-naturally - Jesus had anticipated that the dismay and horror of the disciples at the brutal, *savage* manner of their rabbi's death would be an...obstacle to clear, sober comprehension of the meaning *and necessity* of His execution;

and so, to prepare them, quoted, *repeatedly* Isaiah's work.

Indeed, Jesus (*explicitly*) mentions the prophet by name in *Matthew* and *Mark* (in one of His early confrontations with 'the Pharisees and the scribes': [Mk. 7:5].

Which is very significant because His practice - His habit - was to make only *oblique* reference to the Old Testament - and especially to the Psalms - *but to leave the specific source unspoken*.

Indeed, apart from Isaiah, Jesus mentions *no other author* (from the Scriptures).

In other words, what Christ was attempting to do was to "collapse;" to shrink the great interval separating *His* ministry - in the first century - and Isaiah's inspired elucidation of it from *waaay* back in the six-hundreds.

It might help to think of it this way:

have you ever watched a movie - probably on BluRay - with the film-maker's commentary?

Or, with subtitles for the hard-of-hearing?

I often do.

They don't tell you just what is being said - that I can hear already(!), subtitles for the hard-of-hearing also make plain what is going on:

they say things like what track is playing on the radio in the background (of the scene), or whether a door opens with a 'creepy' squeak; or if the music is 'foreboding'.

And these are all important details that elaborate what is taking place.

The mood, then, of the moment on the screen - and how you're supposed to respond to it - are much more clearly "signposted."

The subtleties or "*Easter Eggs*" as they are called - a poster on a wall in the background; a logo on a t-shirt - no longer need to be gleaned or guessed, they are explained openly.

This is the role that Isaiah plays.

He isn't necessary, but he *helps*.

So, let's take a look at what he says - which, in this passage (the one printed in your Order-of-Service), is mostly the same thing, repeated in different ways: And let's focus on this line: 'The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous.' [Is. 53:11]

Jesus, then, was innocent.

He was *sinless*.

(He never *ever* told a lie or had a covetous thought, or did any of those selfish, short-sighted things we do all the time.)

Not even His enemies could find a justifiable reason for their arrest of Him.

They did it out of jealousy.

They hated Jesus' popularity.

They hated His success at healing.

(How sick is that?!)

And so we see in the gospel how Pilate struggles to come to terms with the Sanhedrin's murderous desire - there was no just cause for execution: [Mt. 27:23a]

It was, as Isaiah underlines, 'a perversion of justice'. [Is. 53:8]

But, and this is, perhaps, the most shocking truth of all: it was a 'perversion' that Jesus *willingly* embraced - because *as such* it was the most appropriate way to attack - to "torpedo" - a state-of-affairs that was "perverted" to its core.

And I'm not just speaking about the inequitable, imperial political establishment in Roman-Palestine, but about a (*spiritual*) situation that one finds expression in us all, and can be glimpsed nightly on television - it can be found in every home and

workplace - in every heart and mind.
And if we don't see it, that's because it *permeates* us.
We don't see it objectively.
It feels natural.
We are like fish in water.

But the violence of the Cross shatters our vain myths.
It skewers our narcissistic illusions.
'All we like sheep have gone astray'. [Is. 53:6]
And yet now *here*, on the hill of Calvary (outside of Jerusalem), is a means back.
Back to the shepherd;
back to the one who *really* loves us.
Who loves us without agenda or self-interest.
Who, clearly, loves us too much to leave us as we are.
So, let's be *more* than that.
To borrow terms from *Isaiah*, let's rise 'very high' with Jesus, and so, thereby, one
glorious day when He returns, be 'exalted'.