

## **Isaiah 50: 4-9a, Philippians 2: 5-11 and Matthew 26: 14-27: 66.**

The reading from Isaiah talks of a servant, who is ridiculed and abused because he speaks of a message that he has been given, the message was the word of God. It always amazes me that the prophets of the old and indeed the new testament were open to ridicule and accepted it. They didn't give up spreading the word of God and neither did they retaliate with violence. They like Jesus turned the other cheek. We on the other hand often find it difficult to even admit to others that we are Christians, in case we are ridiculed. The Anglican church itself in some cases is so vitriolic when certain groups disagree with others, is it any wonder that people are reluctant to come to church. The disagreements may not result in physical violence, but the language used can be harmful and this can cause untold hurt, which can take years to recover from, Wouldn't the world be a better place if we ourselves could learn to disagree, respectfully and move forwards without causing offence to others and allowing God to be the one who looks after the bigger picture trusting in him, just as the servant did. He allowed God to work out the bigger picture, God's got this you know, he unlike us knows how things should be, he knows what he wants from us and of us and when the time is right there will be reconciliation between those who disagree and no one group will have the upper hand.

The well-known hymn "At the name of Jesus" is some would say based on this passage in Philippians. Whether you agree with this or not what we are presented with is a heavenly being who comes down to earth in human form, to be a servant. A servant not just of his heavenly father but of mankind. It is important that we remember that Jesus came to serve and not to be served. That he would give himself so completely that not only would he be ridiculed in the same way that the servant in the Isaiah reading was, but that he would be so abused by the people of the time that he would die upon the cross so that we can be free. Jesus was spat on and beaten, so although this reading is full of the glory of Jesus and exalts him to a place in heaven, we cannot and should not forget the passion of Christ. We like to think that we know what is coming for us in the next life and it can be easy to ignore the bad things we have done, the times when we have let God down, and in our rush to get to Easter Sunday it is easy to ignore the pain and suffering of Christ and how we might have added to it ourselves. It is only when we have walked in darkness and come through the other side that we can truly celebrate with Jesus in his resurrection story and have a glimpse of our own redemption.

This Sunday is known as passion Sunday or Palm Sunday. These are two very different forms of celebration if they can even be called that. Palm Sunday is the celebration of Jesus riding into Jerusalem, the crowds are singing his praises, waving their palm branches and all is well. Passion Sunday on the other hand focuses on what is known as the passion narrative, Jesus's final days before he is crucified. This part of the reading sets a totally different scene, we are faced with the gruesome death of an innocent man and yet a death that has to happen so that we too can be resurrected to a new life when we accept the gospel and choose to walk in Christ's light. The gospel reading today makes for good viewing and that is why there are so many films and television series made about these final few days in the life of Jesus, In the film "The passion of the Christ" by Mel Gibson we are faced with one of the most brutal descriptions of the final days of Jesus's life. Some people said this film was too brutal and sensationalist, I

would disagree. This film even with its horrific portrayal of Jesus's final days is probably the most true to life, we cannot and nor should we sugar coat the final days of Jesus's life. We do this with his birth, we sanitize things to make them more palatable, which does a disservice to the pain and suffering Jesus went through. It doesn't do us any harm in my view to be reminded that events were brutal and messy, just like life is sometimes for some of us. The most memorable scene for me is one where Jesus is carrying his cross and he stumbles, the shot pans to his mother Mary and for one brief moment you think she is going to rush forward and help him. Instead there is a flashback to when Jesus was a child and he fell down, in this instance Mary goes to Jesus and tenderly comforts him. Mary must have longed to do this as Jesus carried his cross, but she knew she could not, this story had to play out to the bitter end. For any parent watching your own child suffer can feel like more than you can bear, but we know when we turn to God he will give us the strength to work through our time of difficulty and to be stronger in the end, although at the time it doesn't feel like it. Whether you want to see today as a day of Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem or the start of the most difficult time in Jesus's life will depend partly on where you are in your own journey with Christ. No way is right or wrong, what we take from these readings is a lesson in how to be obedient servants of God, how to learn to live alongside those we disagree with and how through a consistent prayer life God will help us to work things out for ourselves. We may not be given the answers we want, we may not even get an answer to our prayers, but that doesn't mean we should give up. God answers us in his own time, he helps us in ways we may not even know we need help. One thing is certain though and that is no matter how many times we fall short in the eyes of God he will always pick us up, comfort us and set us back on our journey's, he will not fail us even when we fail him. So as we enter into Holy week let us take this journey with Christ, with all the suffering that goes with it, so that on Easter day we can truly say we are beginning our journey into a new and risen life with Christ.

Amen.