Palm Sunday • Isaiah 50:4–9a • April 13, 2014

Glenn Nielsen
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, nielseng@csld.edu

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10:11 for the same four “flesh and bones” elements). The assumption is that God can do this.

Key word repetitions abound: the “hand of YHWH” (yād-yhwh) upon the prophet to give him special revelation; the various uses of “spirit” (ru’ach, ten times) “bones” (also ten times), the verb “to prophesy” and “to live/come back to life,” and the use of hinneh at key moments: v. 3 (two times), vv. 5, 7, 8, 13).

The image is of a great defeat in a battlefield valley, where the bodies of the “slain” (v. 9) have not been buried but allowed to decay. Thus the command to “prophesy to these bones” (v. 4) seems ludicrous: there were no ears to “hear the word of Yahweh.” But this is the word of the Creator, and the scene is reminiscent of Genesis 2: flesh and bones from the face of the earth, awaiting the breath of life.

Then comes the key role of the “spirit, wind, breath” (ru’ach). This is not ordinary wind but comes, as it were, from the four compass points all at once (v. 9), and there is life.

Verse 10 cleverly combines the “very many” and the “very dry” now as a “very, very (me’od me’od) great army” standing on its feet: the slain ones resurrected to rejoin the tseba’oth, yes, right here on earth.

A sound and an earthquake (v. 7) surround the scene. One anticipates both Good Friday and the resurrection, when creation itself participates in giving up the dead.

Finally, the goal is that “you will know that I am YHWH,” which is code for all God is and does as the one true God: Creator and Redeemer, who raises up a mighty people as his own by the power of the Spirit. The God “who knows” (v. 3) is to be known (vv. 6, 13, 14). He will be known when he opens graves, puts his life-giving spirit into his resurrected people, and places them in the land as one people (v. 18) under one king (v. 24), so that the nations will know that Yahweh is the one who makes holy (v. 28).

Homiletical Thoughts

The resurrection is coming: that is the goal, and it brings hope to a hopeless people, not just death but resurrection. But first death: one cannot be raised from the dead until one is dead. So Yahweh has come as Shepherd-King, in a parody of a royal procession on Palm Sunday and then as the Lamb that was slain for us, on the great battlefield. But this is not a story of life and death; it is a story of death—and life.

And then a mighty army becomes the church militant upon the land—now the whole earth—united with the church triumphant, wherever the risen and reigning Shepherd-King is proclaimed and known.

Andrew H. Bartelt

Palm Sunday • Isaiah 50:4–9a

We Would Like to See Jesus

This sermon was prepared for Grace Lutheran Chapel in Bellefontaine Neighbors, Missouri. It makes use of various pictures of Jesus’s face from the church and school.
The approach combines verses from the text with the pictures. The goal is to give visual support to the sermon at key moments while also adding meaning to the pictures see at the church. The full version of this sermon can be found at concordiatheology.org.

The gospel reading for this Sunday has various options. This sermon uses John 12:20–43, and the introduction to the sermon is based on the Greeks’ request to see Jesus. The liturgical focus is Jesus’s passion, not the triumphant entry of Palm Sunday.

The introduction makes use of a familiar picture of Jesus by Warner Salmon (http://www.warnersallman.com/collection/images/christ-at-hearts-door/). While we would like to see Jesus as the Greeks did, we do not have any real life pictures or paintings of Jesus. Instead, we have Isaiah 50 that clearly reveals what Jesus does with his eyes, ears, cheeks, and mouth.

At verse 4, suddenly and without introduction, the Servant of the Lord speaks. This passage is a prelude to Isaiah 53, and the servant stands out in contrast to complaining, rebellious Israel. While so many of the people are blind and deaf to the Lord, the servant listens obediently and without rebellion. The instructed tongue results from someone who listens and learns perfectly so that he can speak the right words. The open ear characterizes one who will do just what he has been instructed to do.

The sermon asserts that Jesus is the servant who is speaking here. He listens to what the Father wants him to say and do. (The contrast set up is between my three-year-old grandson who makes his parents angry by ignoring them and how God is never angry with Jesus.) Two events from Jesus’s life are retold to highlight Jesus’s obedient listening: his baptism and his transfiguration, both of which have the Father declaring how well pleased he is with his Son. The picture used shows Jesus’s ears (http://picturesofjesus4you.com/235.html), described as listening ears.

The sermon moves next to what the listening servant’s obedience looks like. His instructed tongue speaks words to the weary. The words are timely and fitting. He says just what the weary needs to hear.

The picture of Jesus used in the sermon at this point is a mural in the hallway leading from the church to the school. Most everyone in the congregation knows it. It shows Jesus hugging a child. The child has his eyes closed and you see a look of peace/comfort on his face. Jesus’s lips are near the child’s ears. The sermon lists a series of moments of weariness (loneliness, fear, guilt, doubt, death, weakness) and combines them with Bible verses containing words Jesus spoke during his ministry. The section ends with Matthew 11:28–29 (the NIV uses the word “weary”).

The servant’s obedience also involves his suffering. Verses 6–7 picture perfectly the horrible agony Jesus will undergo. Pulling out the beard publicly shames and humiliates. The action shows utter contempt to go with the spitting. Yet the key phrase here is how the servant has his face set like flint. Drawing on Luke 9:51, Jesus’s resolve is to go to Jerusalem where this suffering and humiliation will strike him down. Nothing will stop him from this appointed task.

The sermon uses a stark picture of Jesus in black and white, with a streak of orange. His face is serious and determined (http://www.jesuspainter.com/JesusPainter/
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After describing what Jesus will go through, the sermon retells how Peter answers correctly Jesus’s question about whom the disciples say he is only to be quickly told to get behind Jesus when he tries to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem.

The servant declaring that he will give his back to be beaten highlights Jesus’s determination to go to Jerusalem—his face set like flint. He will not hide his face from the degradation. He is in control of all that will happen to him. Philippians 2:8 is quoted here.

The sermon turns to the question of why Jesus would go through this suffering and humiliation. The picture used is of Jesus, his face bowed down in death on a crucifix. Jose Fuentes de Salamanca’s line drawing captures the drama and emotion well (www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.434983796589450.1073741829.393293137425183&type=3). The sermon moves beyond Jesus’s words to the weary, important as they may be, to the deeper purpose of Jesus’s work: forgiveness and eternal life.

The last verses of the text focus on the servant’s vindication. God will help him. No charges against him will stick. The ultimate victor against the servant’s enemies is certain. Indeed, the Father brings his Son from the grave and will not let him see decay.

The sermon finishes with a picture of Jesus as a shepherd holding a lamb in one arm and reaching out in invitation with his other hand, the scar from the nail visible. The proclamation is that because he lives we too will live. The sermon concludes with the encouragement to see ourselves pictured with Jesus because he is the Good Shepherd who not only laid down his life for us but also took it up for us.

Glenn Nielsen

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Easter Sunday • Acts 10:34–43 • April 20, 2014

In this pericope, Peter portrays Christ’s resurrection as God’s vindication of his identity and his work. In the resurrection, God gives assurance that Jesus is Lord and the judge of the living and the dead. The resurrection also gives assurance that through his name sins are remitted (cf. Lk 5:20–25). The Jews who rejected Jesus did not believe that he was anointed with the Spirit and that “God was with him” (Acts 10:38), but instead believed that he had an evil spirit (see Lk 11:14–20) and regarded him as one who did not keep the law (see especially Lk 6:1–11). They also did not believe that he could forgive sins (Lk 5:17–26). These reasons were reflected in their taunt at the cross: “Others he saved; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, the chosen One” (Lk 23:35). But God showed that Jesus was his chosen One by raising him from the dead (cf. Acts 2:22–36), and that good, redemption, and forgiveness come through him.

Peter shows that the good news is not only for the “sons of Israel” but for anyone from any nation (Acts 10:35–36). To this point, Jesus has been identified usually with Israel’s redemption (e.g., see Lk 1:54; Lk 1:58; Lk 2:8–11; Lk 24:21; Acts 1:6). To be sure, the universal reach of God’s blessings through Christ had been signaled (e.g., see Lk. 2.32; Lk 7.2–10; and Ac 1.8), and God had promised this even to Abraham (Gn 12:3, 22:18). But the realization of God’s impartiality comes to light at this point in the narrative.