

2014

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

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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.

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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 seen 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/>

Gallery.html#0). 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.