

Which Way Are We Facing? – March 25, 2016  
By Wayne J. Schneider – Cum Sancto Spiritu

## Which Way Are We Facing? Isaiah 52:13—53:12

We here reached a crucial point in our Lenten journey. It is here that the Christian faith is different than our sisters and brothers who are Buddhist, or Muslim, or Jewish, or other. The events of Jesus' three-year ministry happened not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but in the context of Hebrew practice and hope. Recall that there was no written Gospel at this time. Can we attempt to view the events of this night from this perspective?

In our Old Testament lesson, we hear what Jesus heard and I think when he heard this, he didn't think: "*Yup, that B me.*" This 'Servant' is someone the church universal often hurries to 'Christianize,' but perhaps we should not.

Some scholars believe that in this passage of Isaiah the 'servant' is a metaphor or a symbol rather than a person. It is difficult to know because the author shifts from the singular to the plural. Sometimes he speaks as an individual and sometimes as the people of God. We hear words that sound a lot like a Messiah, but then we hear words that sound like a prayer of confession.

There is, however, a steady theme throughout these verses: The life of a servant in a counter-cultural context is hard to the max. And apparently, given the choice, God prefers a world where peace and justice prevail.

In just this passage alone there is enough material for, say, 25 sermons. But, there is a central focus that screams of American culture is: Individual beauty. Look at the physical depiction of the servant. It is as if some Hollywood FX department provided the details for Isaiah.

By this description he seems unhuman, alien even. This is so because his form is so battered, broken, and wounded. Why is the Servant so physically devastated? His

body is carrying our dis-ease, our iniquities, and our sin. Verse 6 reads, "*The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*"

Is this a part of our belief system? Do we believe in "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world?" (St. John 1:29) We rarely think of the disease of leprosy, and even AIDS is fading from the forefront of our news. Thankfully, the church no longer looks upon illness as coming from God.

Where, then, does it come from? In 1945, on my first birthday, the A-bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, then later Nagasaki. One could say that was the beginning of our slow slide into corporate illness. Radiation sickness, death by toxic waste, black lung, AIDS as a weapon in Africa, and Nazi Germany's human experimentation and the murder of over 6,000,000 people, there is no need to say more.

We may have not piloted the Enola Gay or dumped chemicals into our rivers, or murdered anyone, but by our deification of capitalism, our decision to remain ignorant of the state of all things ecological, and even our turning our backs on all of the consequences of our inactions, have consequences.

None of these and others are not the judgment of God. The tragic events stemming from all of this are on us. On those in positions of power, and others who are our enemies, who count human life as nothing, as having no value. These are the ones the Servant stands beside in his hideous condition, absorbing our dis-ease, iniquities, and sin.

Jesus the Christ, requires that we stop hiding our true selves; to cease turning our face from him. It could be that, on this Good Friday evening, you and I may be obedient to his call, commit ourself to our Messiah? Could we stop pretending that our eyes are not seeing what we see? If so, we could understand the purpose of tonight's passage of Holy Scripture.

The function of Holy Scripture is not to be a 'travel guide' to Biblical antiquity. It is about our relationship with God. Always. Tonight's passage is not a sample of early Hebraic poetry. It is a personal invitation to our holy work.

You will never find, in any of Jesus' instruction, how to let him advocate for the poor in our place. Nor will you hear him say, "You just rest in your lifestyle, because I know how busy you are, what with your work and your home, and all. Why don't you let me, like Nike, 'Just Do It?'"

Last evening we were reminded again that we have been called by God to be his servants. Jesus was a servant, but only one. My hero, The Rev'd Dr. Albert Schweitzer was a servant, as was Mother Teresa, Mahatma Ghandi, and The Rev'd Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These were good servants. We, the family of God, are called to be God's servants. This is not optional. And this call does not end until we find ourselves on the other side of the Jordan river.

On this night when we, and all of our sisters and brothers, remember what God in Christ Jesus has done for us, may we take up God's work with steadfastness and enthusiasm. May our lives bring honor to God by telling the story of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. May it ever be so. Alleluia. Amen.