

By His Wounds We Are Healed
Isaiah 53:4-5
3rd Wednesday in Lent
February 27, 2013

For the past two weeks we have been considering the passages from Isaiah that describe a sharp contrast between what Christ first appeared to be and what Christ is seen to be through the eyes of faith.

He grew up like a tender, young plant struggling to survive in a hostile desert. He had no outward glory or majesty to attract us to him. Yet he is the arm of the Lord, the power of God reaching out to save us. Last week we learned that appearances can be deceiving.

Tonight's text speaks of sickness and pain. You have probably heard someone say that they or someone they know "has never been sick a day in their life." This is usually said tongue-in-cheek to make a point. If such people existed, they would truly be remarkable people.

Most of us get sick at least once or twice per year. For some of us, it seems we get over one sickness just in time to contract another one. And some poor souls are afflicted with chronic, constant sickness, such as arthritis, Alzheimer's, or diabetes. Regardless of how good or poor our health is, our fate in this world is to be susceptible to sickness and pain.

Often times people ask, "Why me? Why does God allow me to get sick and suffer? What have I done to deserve this?" The Bible says that the reason there is sickness and suffering in the world is because of sin.

Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and because of their sin, sickness, pain, and death entered the world. The first mention of pain in the Bible is in the curse of painful childbirth for Eve after the fall into sin: *To the woman [God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children"* (Gen 3:16a NIV).

Some people assume that sickness and pain mean that God is punishing you for something you've done. Listen to Jesus' disciples make this mistake: *As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"* (Jn 9:1-2 NIV). In the story of Job, Job's friends asked him what he had done that was so awful that God would punish him so terribly.

But God's Word doesn't say that. The Bible says we suffer because we are sinful, frail human beings, who live in a fallen world. The question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is a mistaken concept. There are no good people in this world. Paul writes: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23 NIV).

That paints a pretty dismal picture. But tonight's reading has some very good news.

Listen again and, this time, bask in the good news of these words: *Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* (Is 53:4-5 NIV).

The two verses of our text paint two completely different pictures of our suffering Savior. The speakers in the first verse jumped to the wrong conclusion: *we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.* When Jesus suffered, they assumed that he was being punished by God for his own sin.

Do you remember what the people said as they mocked Jesus when he was on the cross? *“He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”* (Mt 27:43 NIV). Those people thought Jesus had committed blasphemy by claiming to be the Son of God and God was punishing him by letting him suffer excruciating pain.

But, they were as wrong as the speakers in our text. The second verse corrects their false impression. Their thought was: *We considered him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted* (Is 53:4 NIV).

However, in sharp contrast to what they believed to be the truth, Isaiah continues: *He was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed* (Is 53:5 NIV).

The nails that pierced Jesus’ hands and feet were placed there because of our transgressions. The sword that pierced his side was thrust into him by our sin. Christ had no sin of his own – no reason to suffer. But in love, he took upon himself all of our sicknesses and pains.

The Good News is that Jesus’ suffering has brought us forgiveness of all our sins. The punishment of Jesus was for our wrongdoing, so that we might escape punishment and be declared innocent before God. Jesus grants us peace and healing. We are at peace, knowing that we are forgiven.

So, when we are sick or when we suffer, we should never again wonder whether or not God is punishing us. Jesus has already suffered the punishment for us. Jesus has paid the price for all sin; past, present, and future, for the whole world. That is what gives us peace and cures our ills.

By His wounds we are healed. Some churches interpret this sentence in a very narrow sense to mean that Jesus promises us immediate healing of all our sicknesses. They promote faith-healing and claim that God promises us a problem-free life. They say, “If you are sick, just believe in Jesus, and you will be healed!”

Some churches and some preachers go so far as to say that if that doesn’t happen – if you aren’t healed – there must be something wrong with your faith. Either you don’t have enough faith or you don’t have the right kind of faith. Some even claim that healing

is on the way if you just give a little more money.

One way or another, it's your fault! That teaching destroys the Gospel in tonight's text. It makes healing something that you are able to achieve on your own by obedience to the Law. Do all the things God tells you to do and healing is guaranteed to be yours. But the message of our text isn't Law; it is Gospel.

Sometimes we're tempted to make a mistake in a different direction. We think that if God doesn't give us the answers we want in our prayers for healing, that he is not listening, or worse, that he doesn't care about us at all. We might worry that God is too busy with lofty matters to concern himself with our earthly problems and physical troubles.

In his Gospel account, Matthew gives us an answer for such doubts. *When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to [Jesus], and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases."* (Mt 8:16-17 NIV).

Jesus cares as much about our problems as he cared about the problems of the people he healed while he was on this earth.

St Peter says this about how much Jesus cares for us. *[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.* (1 Pet 2:24-25 NIV).

God is truly concerned about our physical condition. God sent his own Son to become a man, to take on our flesh and blood, and to be afflicted physically on our behalf. Jesus endured the sufferings and pains common to all humanity. He was pierced and died for us on the cross, then rose from the grave as the guarantee of the resurrection of our own bodies.

We have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. That means that one day we will be permanently healed from all sickness and pain. We will rise with an incorruptible body that will never be subjected to suffering. And, until that day of resurrection arrives, we have this certain word of promise: *By his wounds we are healed.*