

# Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

## SUSTAIN THE WEARY

Isaiah 50:4-9

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### Analysis by Timothy Hoyer

4The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; 8he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Passing Judgment on the Word of God

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *TV and Experience Are Better than God's Word*

The Ethiopian asked Philip, "About whom is the prophet speaking—himself or another?" Since this is God's word of law and promise, then it is both the prophet and another who are spoken of. The prophet speaks law and promise, and the prophet

speaks about the one who will be the promise. The external problem is that people, especially those in exile, are weary, tired of the effort to survive each day, and ready to give up, even to give up on God. But even though they are weary, they still rebel by passing judgment on those who teach them God's word (v. 6), as if they know better than the teacher (*Luther's Works*, volume 17, 194). People today still think they have the authority to decide what is good and evil in what is taught to them. What the pastor preaches is judged by the listeners according to what they have read and heard elsewhere, as if the word of God is not as trustworthy as someone on TV or someone who has written a book or as trustworthy as someone's personal experience. When a pastor was elected as bishop of an ELCA synod, he had to leave his congregation and find another congregation that he could join. As he went to different congregations with his wife, they would ask each other about the sermon after church, "Did you hear Jesus mentioned?" The other would answer, "No." Thus even those who preach no longer listen.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *We Trust Other Things as Better than God*

That attitude of not listening reveals who we trust. We do not trust the Lord GOD nor his word that sustains the weary. We trust ourselves, our own judgment. We trust reason and our experience. We trust fun and entertainment, and pursue them as if they were works that endured to eternal life, or at least endure for two hours because there is only this life. We trust in our accomplishments, in what we get done each day, as if these were works that endure to give us life.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *But Death Is Greater Than Other Things*

Our problem then is with God, because we say God is not worth trusting. God no longer is the one who vindicates us, but rather is the one who confronts us and declares us guilty of false

faith. And we wear out like a garment, eaten by moths. We become weary. God confronts us wearing the mask of death.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Word of God Is for Us**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *It Is God Who Helps Us*

Surprisingly, now it is actually God who helps us (vv. 7, 9) by sending us his Word, his Promise, in the form of the human born Jesus, the Son of God. He speaks to sustain the weary, he speaks to cure the lame, he speaks to raise the dead. Yet he is judged, rebelled against, stricken, smitten, spit upon, and insulted (v. 6). But now it is Jesus who is speaking in our reading from Isaiah, and he says, "Who will contend with me? Who are my adversaries? Who will declare me guilty?" We stood up to contend with him, putting him on a cross and burying him. But it is God who helps him and raises him up from death! God acts against the law of death, for he is God and not subject to the law. No one can declare Jesus guilty. All must now listen "as those who are taught" (v. 4).

**Step 5. Advanced Prognosis (External Solution)** : *God Gives Us Faith in Jesus*

We are taught that Jesus is for the bad guys, those who judge God, those who trust in other gods. Even more, bad guys who trust Jesus are now the good guys and gals (from Ed Schroeder's summary of the first seven articles of *The Augsburg Confession*). Preachers especially now have their ears opened, are awakened by Jesus, to give their back of pride to God, to be struck with mercy that kills our false faith and raises us to a new life of forgiveness and eternal life by trusting Jesus. Jesus even awakens faith in us. The Spirit uses the sustaining words of Jesus like blocks of stone and builds an altar of faith in Jesus in our hearts.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** : *Faith in Jesus*

### *Sustains the Weary*

Now we are sustained in our weariness. Now we are strengthened in our weakness. For God to be merciful, we need to be sinners. For God to be our strength, we must be made weak. For God to be forgiving, we understand that we are those who need forgiving. God's sustaining word is for the weary, not those who can do it all themselves. When we speak this new word about Jesus sustaining us, we will be insulted, judged, argued with, rebelled against, and treated as unimportant, not needed—as if Sunday church was the last thing on anyone's list of fun things to do on a Sunday after a whopping good time on Saturday night. We get to find the weary and sustain them with a word, the Word of God, the Word that announces Jesus raised from death to raise us from death, to forgive us, to give us mercy, hope when we despair, help when we are helpless, the body of Christ when we belong nowhere, and love as a gift when we tire of earning it. The prophet speaks of Jesus who sustains us, who is for us when others would declare us guilty.