

# **Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost**

## **HEALED BY A WOUNDED SERVANT**

**Isaiah 53:4-12**

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**Analysis by Ronald C. Neustadt**

4Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. 9They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. 11Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12Therefore I will allot him a portion with

the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Self-Inflicted Wounds**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : “Gone astray”**

Judah was in exile because, like sheep, they had all “gone astray ... turned to their own way.” The external evidence of their “astray-ness” lay in their “grinding the face of the poor” (3:15) and in their worshiping the gods of prosperity. Isaiah and other prophets had spoken plainly of Judah’s “astray-ness.” This is not the way God’s people were to live. Hadn’t the commandments made that clear? Haven’t the commandments made that much clear to us? Of course, they had—and still do. As a result, those 10 Words do not provide instruction so much as they accuse: “You’re getting—you will get—what you deserve.” For Judah, that was the end of their kingdom, their Temple and their possession of the land. What shall it be for us? Has it already begun?

If Judah did not know why they had been defeated and were living “in exile,” it was because they hadn’t been listening to God’s prophets. Their once-great kingdom had fallen because they had “gone astray.”

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : “Walking in the flame of our own fire”**

Why had they “gone astray?” Isaiah had said it earlier (50:11) in the third “servant song”: They had “walked in the flame of their own fire,” i.e. they figured they didn’t need any light from God (as in “Your word is a light ...”). They had their own light to show them the way, didn’t they? Why fear, love, or

trust God when you've got your own light? After all, when we look at ourselves with our own light, we don't look all that bad. When we look at ourselves with our own light, we may not even see how we, too, "grind the face of the poor," even those of us who think that our solutions for the poor are "enlightened."

We can choose to do that if we wish. We can choose to follow the light of the fires we have lit. We can choose to trust ourselves, even if our selves tell us that we have no need of repentance, even if our selves tell us that we look just fine in the light of the fires we have lit.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *"Lying down in torment"*

But it turns out that God has something to say, too: "If that's your choice – your persistent, insistent choice – to follow your own light farther and farther away from my light, then finally all you're going to have is no light at all. Because your light cannot last." In the word of the LORD that Isaiah passes on, "This is what you shall have from my hand: you shall lie down in torment" (50:11). [For Judah "lying down in torment" meant exile from land and temple and kingdom. Ultimately it means exile from life itself—not just for Judah, but for all of us.]

## **PROGNOSIS: Healed by a Wounded Servant**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *"Lying down in torment...for us"*

But look Who comes to take on the burden that causes us to lie down in torment! Look Who comes to join all us sheep who have gone astray and who gets led like a sheep to the slaughter himself. Look Who lies down in torment himself, all because he would not back down from offering us the promise of God's forgiveness for our having trusted ourselves and followed our own lights. Look Who willingly takes responsibility for that

iniquity—our self-trusting iniquity. Look at Who comes to promise us, “I have come to have your iniquity laid upon me!” And look Who gets crushed for doing so. Look Who gets cut off from the land of the living and even “makes his grave with us” where there is no light—in order to bring us light. . . And look Who gets raised from the dead for being so merciful to us—and so faithful to the merciful will of God!

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Walking in His Light***

When, by raising this bruised and broken Promiser from the dead, God persuades us of the trustworthiness of this suffering servant, we do find ourselves trusting him (at least for a while). That is, we find ourselves following the light of his merciful promise to us rather than the “light” of our own wills that would draw us away from him and each other. We find ourselves trusting him, not only when he speaks words of forgiveness to us, but also when he invites us to be servants with him.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Gone Serving***

And that’s exactly what happens when he causes us to trust him. We become more servant-like ourselves. We find ourselves more willing (at least for a while) to join our fellow human beings who are themselves bruised and wounded. We do it in order to help make them whole, and in order to bring them the Good News of that unique Servant who gave all of himself to bring wholeness to all of us.