



Grain

“But who do you say that I am?” –Jesus Christ, Mark 8:29

Field

4 The Lord God has given me a trained tongue,[a] 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. 5 The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I did not turn backward. 6 I 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. 7 The 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; 8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me. Let us stand in court together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9 It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? Isaiah 50:4-8

Thoughts

How far back does the wisdom of finding our freedom in God above all other powers extend? Isaiah’s passages about the one we know as the suffering servant were written hundreds of years before Christ. Isaiah doesn’t give that servant a name, probably to depict more than one individual and for the reader to identify with. How are we God’s servants sustaining the weary with our words and our listening? How are we holding fast to our relationship with God as a main part of our identity?

The suffering servant lived in exile under Babylonian rule. There is evidence that the Babylonians turned Yahweh’s followers into slaves. Whether as an Israelite you were forced into servitude or not, you would have experienced the profound displacement of being forced into exile. To profess that the Israelites were God’s servants rather than in spiritual bondage to the empire reframed their lives and gave them courage to return home when the time was right. That kind of reframing could also put the followers of Yahweh in direct conflict with their oppressors or those who had become comfortable in exile.

The notion of a suffering servant can conjure thoughts of a passive individual who is always compliant. Some say those types of qualities make you Christlike. Others have always looked for models of God interacting with the world that reflect Old Testament warrior kings, which have also been projected onto Jesus. But the words of the suffering servant were subversive without being violent and transformative to a group of people who otherwise felt helpless.

The echoes of the suffering servant are heard in Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked the question at a time of crisis. What would his followers choose? Peter responded, “You are the Messiah.” Peter was beginning to realize, though imperfectly, that what he experienced in Christ was the way God worked. That way was more powerful than any empire or political system that rises or falls, or any illness or suffering, or label levels of our identities.

In the 21st century, we are invited to identify with the suffering servant. Contexts change. Our unwillingness to be silent rooted in our identity in Christ takes on new forms within God’s communion of saints. Happy Monday!

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Many blessings upon you,
Pastor Cindy