

October 18, 2015  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, IA  
Pastor Amy Zalk Larson

Isaiah 53:4-12  
Psalm 91:9-16  
Hebrews 5:1-10  
Mark 10:35-45

[Click here to read these scripture passages](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

These scripture passages we just heard have raised lots of issues for our faith community. As a result, there've been lots of good questions swirling around Good Shepherd this week.

During the Wednesday night supper conversation, we talked about the Psalm we just sang- Psalm 91.

- All of us at my table said “what?—‘Because you have made the Lord your refuge, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near you?’ Really?”
  - That has not been the experience of any of us who were around that table.
  - We have turned to God as a refuge, we have trusted God and still evil has befallen us.
- We especially had trouble with the line “those who love me, I will deliver, I will protect those who know my name.”
  - So if we aren't protected from evil does that mean we don't love God properly?
  - What's going on there?
- Many people find this Psalm incredibly comforting, especially when it's sung as a hymn like “On Eagle's Wings”, but for many it raises painful concerns.

Then at Bible study on Thursday morning we wondered about the first lesson from Isaiah- especially the verse that says it was the will of God to crush him with pain. What's up with that?

Why would God will that God's own servant be crushed with pain, especially since the Psalm says God protects those who love God?

Both of these texts raise good and important questions about how God works in the world: questions that scripture raises, questions that have been swirling around faith communities for centuries.

I wonder if James and John from the Gospel story today had some of these same questions when Jesus said he was going to suffer and die.

- They were just coming to understand that Jesus was the Messiah, the one chosen by God to bring in God's new kingdom.
  - But they believed the Messiah would use power and might to defeat the enemies of God's people. How would a Messiah who went and got himself killed do that?
  - Besides, if Jesus was God's chosen one, why wouldn't God protect him?
- And what about the disciples, what did all this mean for them?
  - If their leader was about to be killed, were they at risk?
  - And as Peter pointed out in the story we heard last week- they had left everything to follow Jesus, they clearly loved God.  
Shouldn't they be protected like Psalm 91 promises?

If all these questions and fears were swirling around in their heads, it's no wonder James and John responded so terribly when Jesus told them that he was about to die.

Did you catch how self centered they sounded?

Jesus said, for the third time in the Gospel of Mark, "you know I'm heading to my execution" and instead of giving Jesus any kind of human empathy- like "wow, that must be rough" "sorry to hear that boss" or "anything I can do?"-instead James and John said "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

Really? He says he's going to die and they ask him to grant a wish?

It reminds me of a time when I was in early high school- my mom came home from a long day at work with a terrible case of the flu, and my only response to her was "Hey, can you drive me to Sara's?"

Maybe Jesus *can* relate to what it's like to be a parent sometimes.

Except none of the kids here would ever act as entitled as me or the disciples right?

It's easy to be hard on the disciples but I'm guessing their heads were too full of questions and fears about about what Jesus' suffering would mean.

After all, it's hard to show empathy when your head feels like it's going to explode.

And even though the disciples responded so selfishly to Jesus, he still showed them great love.

He asked them questions and he taught them about another way of being in the world.

The first question he asked them- "what is it you want me to do for you?"- is the same question he asked of others who came to him seeking healing.

This makes me wonder if Jesus was working to heal the disciples with his questions and his teaching about service.

And It makes me wonder if those same questions and teaching can heal us also.

After all, we have so many fears and questions about suffering and God's ways in the world: "Why do bad things happen to good people? What is God's will?"

Where is God? Why didn't God prevent this suffering Why does God seem silent?"

These questions come out of our life experiences.

They are good and important and we should ask them.

But the questions can also lead us to get self absorbed and isolated.

Sometimes we dive head first into them and then get stuck in the mud as we swirl and spin through all our confusion.

Sometimes we just want to escape questions and stay in our happy place where we won't have to think about them.

I think this may be part of the reason James and John were asking to sit at Jesus's right and left hand: "Take us away into glory Jesus so we can be above it all and don't have to deal with all this suffering and death."

Sometimes we grab hold of what seems like an answer and get adamant that we have found the truth.

Other times we despair that we'll ever feel confident in our faith again.

All of these responses can isolate us from God and others as we focus on how our life is affecting us. We can get curved in on ourselves.

We can become as self centered as James and John- thinking that somehow we're owed a sheltered life or should expect answers to all our questions.

Living with a sense that we're entitled to happiness or certainty is a joy-killing way to live. We become disappointed, jealous and hurt.

But Jesus doesn't leave us there.

Jesus comes to us today in his Word to ask us new questions, to teach us and to heal us.

And one of the main ways Jesus heals us is by calling us out of our self absorption into a life of community and service.

We discover we don't just have to escape or analyze the suffering of the world, together we can follow Jesus into loving and healing the world.

Jesus didn't seek to escape the pain of the world.

He entered into it fully on the cross and brought new life in the midst of all it.

Now he meets us in our fears, questions and struggles as he brings life for us and for the world.

Jesus, the one who came to serve and to not be served, comes to serve us today at the table with his cup, with his life.

He comes to set us free and to send us out to share in the healing of the world.

We aren't given answers to all our questions.

We aren't given guarantees, certainty, or a chance to avoid the world's pain.

We aren't given everything we might think we want but we are given what we need.

We are given a God who asks us new, empowering questions that draw us out of our self absorption and into God's healing work.

We are given a God who calls us into community where we can seek, learn, and wrestle with questions together rather than in isolation.

We are given a God who has come to make a dwelling place among us in Jesus.

We are given a God who has come to share in our sufferings and to bring us freedom, healing and new life.

Thanks be to God.