

Reflection for Good Friday 2024 based on Isaiah 52 v13 to 53 v12

Jesus died, rose and became a people. These are the words of the theologian, Aidan Kavanagh. Jesus Christ died and rose and became a people. We are a part of that people. As the people of Christ we bear a certain identity, described to us through Scripture. We are transformed into that identity through the reading and study of Scripture, through worship and prayer, and through works of justice. As the people of Christ, we bear the kingdom in a world darkened by despair. As the people of Christ, we reveal the joy and the hope and the true peace of God's kingdom to a world torn apart by violence and greed. As the people of Christ, God entrusts us with the fruitful use of our God-given gifts to work with God to bring the fulness of the kingdom on earth as in heaven.

Jesus died, rose and became a people. As we focus our attention today on the death of the Messiah, the Lord and Saviour of the whole world, it is our opportunity to do some serious reflection on his death and on our lives as his people. Easter is just hours away and are we ready? Are we ready to acknowledge and celebrate the greatest event in the entire history of our salvation? As the people of Christ, are we daily a sign of God's kingdom to the world? Do our thoughts, words, and deeds daily witness to the presence of God's kingdom? Are we allowing God to use us as instruments of God's kingdom or are we doing our own thing and hoping that it somehow fits in with God's purpose? God's purpose: total reconciliation, three-way interconnected right relationship between God, people, and planet. Jesus died to reconcile all things to God through himself – to be able to share the gift of the Holy Spirit, his presence within us, that we might become ministers of reconciliation in his name, continuing the gathering work

through the power of the Holy Spirit until the whole world has been healed, with all humanity living together in true peace and equality, living in harmony with the rest of creation, walking in God's ways. Throughout all of Lent, and most especially today, we must think on these things.

Jesus died, rose, and became a people. Jesus spent his life showing us, teaching us how to live as God's people in God's kingdom so that, when he died, we would be able to continue. Jesus preached, Jesus healed, Jesus fed the people, drawing all people to himself. He built community. He birthed a family. Everyone who does the will of the Father is my family, he tells us. That is who we are meant to be – together – God's family.

We know that families – even the family of God – don't always get things right because we are human. You know that saying about 20/20 hindsight? Well, we have 20/20 hindsight...we have the benefit of learning from the mistakes of others who have come before us in this great Story of Salvation. Today, the passage from Isaiah holds up to the light one doozie of a mistake. It hammers home a particularly valuable insight for us that is, and always has been, extremely pertinent in society – judgement based on appearances.

Isaiah writes the song of a servant of God who “had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” This servant was despised and rejected, he says, held to be of no account. And yet, this servant bore our infirmities, carried our diseases, was wounded because of our faults, and made us whole, healed us. Christians read or hear this passage and they find Christ in there. Isaiah wrote these words for an exiled community finally returning home. Brutalized and traumatized by war and enslavement they

returned to rubble – like the bombed out photos of the places we see on the nightly news. In Isaiah’s song we find, too, the suffering leader of a prophetic group – striving to follow God’s ways, live a righteous life, lead by example, but he is killed for his troubles.

The Church is to be found in here as well. As Christ’s body, if he is found in Isaiah’s song then so, too, are we. Rejected and held in little account, irrelevant to society. Full of mainly old people, struggling financially, not well-attended. Persecuted and illegal in parts of the world.

Each one: Jesus, the Jewish people, the prophet leader, the Church – judged and found lacking according to the values of the world. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? The world has always been this way. We live in a culture “infused with the corrosive impact of pervasive artificial, appearance-driven media and self-glorifying power-seeking” (Katie M. Heffelfinger, workingpreacher.org).

But before we get too comfortable feeling hard done by as the Church, we must realize that we judge by appearances along with the rest of humanity. We do it as a Church and we do it individually, causing great harm as we go. It was the religious leaders – the religious leaders in the Passion Narrative who say to Pilate, we don’t want unsightly naked bodies hanging on the crosses on the Sabbath so, if the men aren’t dead, break their legs and take them down. Much harm has been caused as we go. The brokenness of humanity – it’s power structures and consumer driven lives causing greed and the lust for more – drove the spikes into Jesus’ hands and feet. We hurt and we are hurt. We break and we are broken.

Into this brokenness comes the love of God. The voice of God calls us from the error of human judgement. The mistakenly despised servant is beloved of God:

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Humans judge by outward appearances, I judge by what is in the heart, God says to Samuel when he is trying to identify the next king of Israel. Those who are the rejected, the despised, can find healing in the embrace of God's love. Those who do the rejecting are called to repent. We all like sheep have gone astray, we hear today. It is, importantly, a communal confession. In this moment we join innumerable multitudes in confessing our ignorance, our looking for God in all the wrong places, and our arrogance in thinking that we hold the keys to all the answers. We are called to deepen our humility and strengthen our compassion. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see the personified perfect embrace of God's purpose for the world. As a Church, as a society, we are summoned by God to embrace and live the example of Christ. Jesus died, rose, and became a people.