

Isaiah 50:1-9

50 Thus says the Lord: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away. ²Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst. ³I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering.

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.

⁴The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher," wrote Isaiah in the verses we read just now. What tongue has God given you? Have you the tongue of the teacher, the preacher, the healer, the encourager, the diplomat? What tongue do you have?

"Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught." Morning by morning do you listen to what the Lord has to say to you and seek to discern how you can use that message that day or in days to come?

The passage moves on and we are, through our faith and through sitting through a number of sermons, moved to see in the figure described Jesus, beaten, abused, spat at and mocked by those around him. Why did he go through all that, because he listened to the voice of God, the voice of his Father, the one who "opened my ear," and did not turn back.

As we near the end of Lent we are ever nearer focussing our minds on the events in and around Jerusalem during the last week of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem and was not to be diverted from his purpose despite the pain of that purpose. The purpose was the redemption of human kind and of the creation which he had been part of creating.

The preachers amongst those reading will be listening for the voice of God that our tongues will have a message for those with whom we worship and to whom God has called us to speak forth words of life and truth. As we approach another Easter it can feel that there is nothing new to be said for the message has been declared for the best part of 2000 years; I have preached upon this story for over 40 years and there are many who have done so for much longer. Let us, the preachers, truly listen for the voice of God this year for what he desires us to say; and may those who listen to the words from the mouth of the preacher discern how they are to share that message with the tongue they have been given.

A message of true hope in a suffering world as the one who was weak overcame the strong through suffering, death and ultimately resurrection.