

Sermon 2008 Palm Sunday - Confirmation  
Text: Is. 50: 4-9a  
Theme: "Serving Like the Servant"

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he knew that he had not finished his work. There was still so much to do. His disciples still needed a lot of work. There were so many people who still did not know him. In fact most of the world was still completely ignorant of his existence and yet in five short days he would be nailed to a cross and suffer the agony of hell.

On confirmation day, I feel a lot like Jesus on Palm Sunday. We have a bunch of people standing up and confirming their Baptismal vows in front of us, but I know there is still so much to do. There is still so much for them to know and faith has to have time to grow before they can even know it. So even if I were to rattle off all the important data, it's not about retaining data and regurgitating it. That's we have done away with that lunacy we once called Questioning Sunday when all the confirmands stood up and reeled off data. It's about faith and can these young men and women use the faith that has been given to them in their lives. And finally, just like with everything else, we have to place them in the hands of God.

The Old Testament text is what we have called one of the Suffering Servant Songs and these passages refer to Jesus' life and work of salvation on the cross. But, while Jesus is the ultimate suffering servant, by our Baptisms we too are suffering servants. While he has suffered the ultimate in damnation, we too walk the path behind him. In a way, confirmation is a crossroads in our lives when we have the opportunity to opt out of this path that our parents set us upon at our Baptisms, or an opportunity to begin the trek wholeheartedly for ourselves.

Isaiah says in verse 5,

The Lord God has opened my ear,

and I was not rebellious;

I turned not backward.

The point of Confirmation and Sunday School and Adult Bible Classes is not to acquire a set amount of knowledge after which we graduate and are done. The point is to, like the suffering servant, have an open ear. So I say to our confirmands what I say to all of you, keep your ears open! We are always growing in Christ. Confirmation is not the completion of Christian education but

graduation to the next level. This is a life time vocation from which there is no retirement.

Isaiah went on to say,

I gave my back to those who strike,

and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;

I hid not my face

from disgrace and spitting.

Being struck, having one's beard pulled and being spat upon are all signs of disrespect that are meant to humiliate the student and deter him from learning. The devil is not interested in any of us growing in Christ. He detests confirmants and any other person who sits at Christ's feet and learns. It's not head knowledge that he fears. He has more head knowledge than any of us. But as we learn from Christ, as we walk that path behind the suffering savior, our faith grows and we become a more and more formidable opponent.

So being persecuted one way or another is to be expected.

Maybe it won't be beard pulling and spitting. Maybe it will be being left out of the group. Maybe it will be being laughed at and mocked by people who are supposed to love you. Maybe it will be sacrificing what

would bring success for what is right. But one way or another persecution will come.

Bottom line for Isaiah?

But the Lord God helps me;

therefore I have not been disgraced;

therefore I have set my face like a flint,

and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?

Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary?

Let him come near to me.

Behold, the Lord God helps me;

who will declare me guilty?

Finally, when all is said and done, we have the Lord on our side.

Think how difficult it was for Jesus to ride through that crowd knowing what awaited him five days later. Think how hard it was for him to hear the praises of the people being sung to him knowing that they

would be cowering in their homes when the Pharisees got the Jews riled up in Pilate's court screaming "Crucify Him!"

We may be called to travel some difficult roads in our lives, but none that are more difficult than the one that Jesus traveled for us and none that are without his help. When the confirmands promise to remain faithful to God even if facing death, they know that Christ stands with them. None of us could make that promise without him. It is he who gives us the strength and the confidence to make such a promise.

But it is not likely that any of us will be staring down the barrel of a gun being told to deny Jesus or die. It can happen, we know that, but it's not likely. It is far more likely that we will be facing a situation in which we must humble ourselves or deny Jesus by maintaining our pride. It is almost certain that we will face times where we must sacrifice something we really want or deny Jesus by withholding our offerings from him and giving them to other gods in our lives. These are the times when we are confronted with the question Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?"

Do you love Jesus enough to stay on that road behind him and continue to learn from him even when that road is steep and rocky and Satan offers you so many other easier, more pleasurable paths? Have you set your faces like flint, knowing that it will be difficult, but knowing also that God is with you empowering you with the waters of Baptism and the body and blood of Christ? This is no small thing.

Reno, Maddie, Taylor, Ben, Cody, Ashley, Sarah, John, Dan, Beckie, Neal, Kyle and Julia, your parents placed you on the path behind Jesus and for about 14 years you have followed along behind him waving palms and shouting Hosanna in the highest. But today, Jesus stops and has turned his eye upon you. Today, you know what Peter felt like the night of Jesus' betrayal as the Lord turned towards him and gazed into his soul. You know how hard it is already to be his disciple, his learner, his follower and you know that it will surely become much harder. Today Jesus stops the parade and turns and looks into your eyes, gazing into your soul and of each one of you he asks, "Do you love me?" And in just a few moments you will have the amazing opportunity to answer him before this congregation of his saints. Amen