

September 13, 2015  
Isaiah 50:4-10

Proper 19B  
A Faithful Finish

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The 2014 season for the Milwaukee Brewers started strong with a 10-2 record. The Brewers were either tied or alone in first place from April 5-August 30. They were playing well, they looked like a team that could push for a playoff spot or even a place in the World Series, but as August came they struggled to finish and they found themselves out of first place and out of the playoffs. The desire to overtake the St. Louis Cardinals was for naught. It's easy to start strong, but it's hard to finish strong.

We've all had the opportunity to finish something? Perhaps it was a major school project or a race or even finishing the harvest on any given year. Perhaps you've been enjoying a good book and you have now finished it. It is something we all encounter, various finishes in our lives. Today, we begin our education year at Trinity and St. Paul. Today we are also beginning something new, really it shouldn't be, we are beginning to learn the catechism together as a congregation. Today we continue on our journey called life. A life that is worth living...a life that will hopefully have a faithful finish. Today, we find that it is easy to begin something. We start out strong. Attendance is good in Sunday School, Bible Study. As the year moves along we get tired, weary, fatigued. It's hard to finish strong. Come May I foresee us struggling for attendance in Bible Study and Sunday school...I pray I'm wrong, but I have seen it in my 5 years of ministry.

The nation of Israel was chosen to be the servant of Yahweh, they were set apart. They were Yahweh's chosen people. Their strong start didn't last long...actually they were grumbling shortly after their release from Egypt. You see, The nation was deaf to the teachings of Yahweh. The nation had nothing left going for them. They have not delivered in their servant role, they have disobeyed Yahweh. They have not listened to Yahweh.

As we think about this nation, Israel, this servant of Yahweh, we can see ourselves there as well. Israel was on a journey; they journeyed from Egypt to Canaan, in the wilderness for 40 years because they would not obey Yahweh God. They journeyed around Canaan, the Promised Land, they even were forced to journey out of their Promised Land into exile, because they not listened or obeyed the voice of the Yahweh their God.

How often are we like unfaithful Israel? Quite frequently! We in our own rights are also servants of Yahweh. Each of us has been called by our baptism, where we start out strong, through the voice of God. Each of us has heard the voice, but yet our ears our deaf, our ears do not listen. In Catechism class we learn that we are to not have any other gods, but yet we battle idolatry on a daily basis. You see fascination with counterfeit gods cuts off all communication between Yahweh and His people, whether

that be you, me or Israel. We all battle this! We all place other things in the place of god, when we do that our finish is not going to be a faithful one. It might very well be cast into your own permanent exile, apart from Yahweh forever.

For Israel, their counterfeit gods, were the gods of the lands they were in. The Ba'al's and the Asherah's. The Golden Calf and not to mention themselves. For us, we too have counterfeit gods. These counterfeit gods are unique to each of us. We all have our own people, places, things that become our gods. Yet, the one thing that is not unique, but yet is common for all people is the fact that you and I find a god inside of us. You and I often are the only things we fear, love, and trust in. We cannot finish faithfully if we don't open our ears and listen and obey our Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. We cannot finish faithfully if we are not in worship, Sunday School, catechesis. We cannot finish faithfully and vigorously if we are not in God's Word on a daily basis.

When we aren't in God's Word, we listen to the words from the world around us, telling us that you and I are most important...you and I need other things more than Yahweh. We need status, fame, wealth, health. We need popularity. We need success. We need to be the best athlete, the best musician, the best this and the best that. It's what the words of the world tell us.

As you think about what you are listening to, think about your ear. Your ear is placed on the outside of your head and not on the inside. As Pastor Lessing says in his commentary, "This physical makeup encourages us to listen to God and not to ourselves."

Yet oftentimes as has been said we use our ears to listen elsewhere. So you see we cannot do this on our own. Just like Israel couldn't do it on their own. We need someone who listens and obeys. Not just that, we need someone who is going to suffer.

But pastor, don't we suffer. We do suffer! Luther writes this: "For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in your, the devil wally harry you, and will make a real doctor for you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word." The Very Word made flesh protects you against the evil one, He protects you against the evil one by His own sufferings.

In our text we read that the Servant had his back beaten, his beard pulled out. He does not hide his face from mocking or spit. This Servant is suffering and He is suffering for you! This Suffering Servant is also certain that He will be vindicated, so He sets His face like flint. In the gospel of Luke it says, that He, being Jesus has set His face towards Jerusalem. Jesus knew that He would be raised on the Third Day, so also the Servant knew He would be vindicated.

This Suffering Servant began strong for you...and let me tell you, He also finished strong for you. Let me tell you how He does that for you. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He knew where He was headed. He constantly had battles with the

Pharisees, the Elders of the Law, the Chief Priests. Yet people followed Him. He went into the homes of sinners, He healed people, He cast out demons, He raised people from the dead. His ministry was flourishing. He even forgave sins...but only God can forgive sins, the people said. So what did He do...he continued strong. They wanted Him dead...even as an infant. There were times they tried to stone Him. Yet He never left His journey. He never faltered down the stretch.

When Jesus, the Suffering Servant, set His face like flint, it was only going to get tougher. It was tougher than the nails that pierced His hands and feet. There was way more than nails, there was beating and striking, scourging and spitting, sweating and bleeding...all for you. He knew He was going to finish valiantly and victoriously and He did...despite all the challenges, the kiss of betrayal, His closest friends running away from Him...the Jews, His fellow people wanting Him dead...and there on the cross, the brief time that He was abandoned by His own Father.

It was there on the cross where He cries a word...one simple word, His last Word before breathing His last: τετελεσται "It is finished." The Suffering Servant was obedient to the end. He listened to the voice of His Father...even while praying "Father, take this cup from me, but not my will be done, yours alone." This word was not a cry of defeat. It's a cry of victory.

It's a cry for you and me that means the Father is welcoming his sinful servants back home. It means that the Shepherd holds you close to Him. It means that the Friend you have in Jesus has infinite love for you. This, the life, death, and resurrection of the Suffering Servant, your Savior Jesus Christ proves that He finished for us.

There's a cry that goes up three days later on an Early Sunday Morning after the stone had been rolled away, a cry that is personal, that gives comfort. Jesus turned to Mary and said, "Mary" and she knew at that point that Jesus was really alive. Jesus gives her a personal greeting. Mary knew that Jesus had finished strong and that the Father vindicated Him.

As Jesus finished strong for you, we see many others in Scripture that trusted in God's love and finished strong. Moses although a sinner, and not being able to cross into the Promised Land finished strong. As Scripture says, "His eyes were not dim, and His strength was not gone." Joshua said these words towards the end of his life, "As for me and my house, we will serve Yawheh." There's countless others in the Old and New Testament, the one we remember the most is this, Paul was in prison in Rome and writes this to young Pastor Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

As Pastor Lessing writes in His commentary: "A faithful finish does not mean finishing first or finishing without disappointment and regret. A vigorous finish comes by daily listening for the Word that sustains the Weary. It is ours when we entrust our lives to the Servant."

And you see...that Faithful finish on Good Friday...it led to the Father vindicating Him and giving Him Easter Glory. As He was resurrected, He secured your resurrection when He returns.

As you continue your journey in this life...there will be disappointments and regrets...you may not finish first...and that's okay. Finish faithful...dig into the Word daily, it will sustain you.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.*