

So, this is it...Holy Week! Each day this week, I have been reading the passages of scripture found in our lectionary. One of the readings for Palm Sunday and again today is from Isaiah 50:4-9a. It's a passage we identify as one of the four Servant Songs found in Isaiah and although I've read it before, this week the first two verses presented themselves to me in a different way. I encourage you to read it in its entirety but here are verses four and five from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):

- 4 *The 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.*
- 5 *The Lord GOD has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I did not turn backward.*

This is a week when many of our Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders serving either in churches or in other ministry settings are spending much of their time preparing and preaching sermons for their listeners. They adeptly form messages for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter, some of them preaching for the first time during Holy Week and some preaching after many Easters in the pulpit. Our preachers proclaim the truth of the gospel as those who have looked and listened for the presence of God in the word and in the world. Their preaching lifts up the gospel as good news announcing a new and radically different social order because Jesus radically changed our way of understanding our human condition..

As I read these two verses of Isaiah, it's clear that God has initiated the relationship with the servant and that God is the source of this calling to preach and teach. In this divine calling, God has opened the ear of the servant and given the ability to speak words of life that will sustain the rest of us as we hear them. Each day - morning by morning - this happens. And it occurred to me that this is exactly what our Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders faithfully do for us morning by morning and day by day. Again and again the servant witnesses and proclaims the truth because the servant listens to God and faithfully obeys.

I've preached from the pulpit exactly twice. Both times were in my home congregation where my church family received me graciously (for which I was entirely grateful!). I have a growing appreciation for the responsibility, the challenges and the exquisite joy that flows from the act of sharing from a Biblical text that which God is revealing. And I am sure that it is only possible to speak these words because of the abiding presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If you are a Teaching Elder or a Commissioned Ruling Elder who has preached or is yet to preach this Holy Week, my prayer for you is that you are guided by the Holy Spirit in such a way that you are able to confidently proclaim the saving grace of Jesus Christ to the people. And for those, like me, who are listening, my prayer for Holy Week is that each one of us will open our ears so that we may encounter the living Word in a new way.

In Service to Christ and the Presbytery,  
Mary