

Day Eighteen

Scripture:

Isaiah 53:1-9

Reflection:

It is common today to picture Jesus as smiling. He smiles when he picks up a child. He grins when he listens to the latest verbal blunder of the outspoken Peter. There is nothing wrong with these images. But, there are reasons why the most famous paintings of Jesus show Him with a face marked by sadness.

Several years ago, my wife and I rushed to Houston, Texas, so that she could be treated for very advanced and aggressive cancer. We were forced to live in Houston for half a year, while some of the most advanced treatments available were administered. MD Anderson Cancer Center is the most extensive cancer treatment hospital in the world. Each year, more than a quarter of a million people from all over the world come for treatment. One day, after we had been in Houston for a couple of months, I was taking Linda to one of the pleasant lounges to give her some time out of her hospital room. She was in a wheelchair, of course. All the cancer treatment medications were hanging from an attachment on the back of the chair.

I rolled her into an elevator and pushed the button for the floor we wanted. Just before the doors closed, a tall middle eastern man in traditional Islamic attire, along with his wife, got into the elevator. She was also in a wheelchair with

medications. She was wearing a traditional hijab. There was no question they were Muslims. I was not at all uncomfortable. But, I was aware the couple were from a different culture, grew up speaking a different language, and followed a different religion. Like most of us in elevators, I did not try to strike up a conversation.

Then, I noticed the man was looking at me. You know, you just have that sense and, sure enough, when I glanced up at him our eyes met. In that moment, he looked over at Linda with her medications attached to her chair. His own wife had a similar set on hers. Then, his eyes met mine, and he slowly just closed his eyes and nodded his head.

Without words, that nod meant, "I understand." It meant, "I am also afraid for my wife." It meant, "We are both husbands who are anxious for our wives." It was a moment of shared-humanity that was powerful and profound. Two men, from two different worlds, anxious for our wives. At that moment, our shared suffering erased culture and language and even, religious divides.

When Isaiah describes the coming Messiah as a "man of suffering," he is describing a deep connection with the lost and hurting children of Adam. The man who laughs with me can make a good day a little better. But, the man who weeps with me can make the darkest night one that can be endured. The first is an acquaintance. The second is a friend. God had one son without sin. But, He had no sons without sorrow.

Family:

What kinds of things make us sad? When you watch someone who is sad, what do you think you should do for

them? Which do you think is better, to go up to someone who is sad and tell them a funny joke? Or, to go up to someone who is sad and quietly give them a big hug? Which would make you feel better if you were sad?

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah tells us what kind of person Jesus was going to be. One of the things he writes is that Jesus will know what it feels like to be sad. He knows how it feels to have people who are mean to you. He knows how it feels to be all alone. He even knows how it feels to be afraid. Of course, Jesus also knows how to smile and probably even tell funny jokes. But, Isaiah wants us to know that the Messiah knows all about what it means to be hurt and to feel sad.

The Jesse Tree ornament for today uses some of the words from Isaiah chapter 53. It says that Jesus was wounded (hurt) for our transgressions (the things we do wrong). It says that Jesus was like a little lamb being led away to be killed. He was very sad, but he did not become angry or fight or run away. He went through all the suffering and sadness of the cross so that we would know how much God loves us.

When we think about Christmas, we usually think about Jesus as a little baby. But, the Bible wants us to also think about the times Jesus will be very sad. The Bible wants us to know that Jesus understands how we feel when we are hurt or sad.

Many years ago, a person wrote a beautiful church song that included these words:

Jesus knows all about our struggles;
He will guide 'til the day is done:
There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus:

No, not one! no, not one!

Prayer:

Many people have found great spiritual renewal and comfort in meditating on the wounds and sufferings of Jesus. In your prayer time, begin with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and talk to God about what Jesus suffers. Pray about his arrest and betrayal. Pray about his trial. Pray about the crown of thorns. Pray about Jesus carrying the cross. Pray about Jesus on the cross. Pray about Jesus finally saying, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Thank God that His love was so deep that His own Son would come to earth to share in what it means to suffer and feel sorrow. Thank God for the tears of Jesus Christ. His tears are a powerful way for God to be with us in our own times of sadness and suffering.