

Isaiah 50:4-9a

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 backwards.

⁶ I 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.

⁷ The 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;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.

⁹ It 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.

Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem,
at Bethphage and Bethany,
near the Mount of Olives,
he sent two of his disciples
²and said to them,
'Go into the village ahead of you,
and immediately as you enter it,
you will find tied there a colt
that has never been ridden;
untie it and bring it.

³If anyone says to you,
"Why are you doing this?"
just say this,
"The Lord needs it
and will send it back here
immediately." '

⁴They went away
and found a colt
tied near a door,
outside in the street.

As they were untying it,
⁵some of the bystanders said to them,
'What are you doing,
untying the colt?'

⁶They told them what Jesus had said;
and they allowed them to take it.

⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus
and threw their cloaks on it;
and he sat on it.

⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road,
and others spread leafy branches
that they had cut in the fields.

⁹Then those who went ahead
and those who followed were shouting,
'Hosanna!
Blessed is the one
who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom
of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem
and went into the temple;
and when he had looked around
at everything,
as it was already late,
he went out to Bethany
with the twelve.

Reading the Prophet This Week

Listen to the 'Third Servant Poem' of 'Second Isaiah'
The figure of the 'suffering servant' emerging in exile
In 4 'servant songs': Isa 42:1-4, 44:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12
Similar to one another, differing from their context

Does it matter if their authorship differs from Deutero-Isaiah?
Can we read it as heard originally, or with Jewish neighbours?
Can we imagine being the opponent, or choosing sides?
Jewish readers would long place Xns on the wrong side!

So who's the Servant? Isaiah? 2nd Isaiah?
another past or future historical figure, or an ideal one?
Is this simply prediction of Jesus, fulfilled once & for all in him?
Collectively, Israel, real or idealized, personified?

V4 introduces the first-person servant voice, inspired, equipped
V5 accepts the role obediently in prophetic tradition

V6 sketches suffering from opposing enemies,
acquiesces to insults of whipping, pulling beard, spitting

V7 denies disgrace, asserts trust in divine support
not removal or victory over the opponents, or divine absence

v8-9 taunts and challenges, disputing the outcome
'trash talk' against the opponents – pick a side!

Is some suffering redemptive?
Can it be vicarious, for others' sake?
Can it be re-presentational, a witness?
What does martyrdom mean, or effect?

Is it possible, or desirable, to 'un-learn' this
Long reduced to a prediction prefiguring Jesus' passion?

Reading the Gospel This Week

The lectionary gives choices for Palm/Passion
Let's take the Mark account of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem
(Rather than John's, or a long passion reading)

What's your 'mental movie' of the entry?
Is the parade and 'Hosanna' all about Jesus,
or is it a general song of ascents for a festival,
and he's not the one centre of attention?

Is the sequence more liturgical, than didactic:
eulogēmenē, hōsanna, eulogēmenē, hōsanna
Do we get the choreography and voicing right,
or is it more like 'shabbat shalom', 'allahu akbar', 'eid mubarek'
(try the 2 disciples as Stoppard's 'Rosencrantz & Guildenstern'!)

Shaping memory in the evangelist's context,
this is more or less than historical factual reporting -
maybe conflating other festivals, like Tabernacles?

If we only had this account, not the other gospels,
Zechariah 9 and 11 associations are barely implied,
about the donkey and varied messianic allusions

Mark adds *erchomenē basileia tou patros hēmōn David*
(or the other gospels omit that 'coming kingdom of ancestor D')
Before or after peak Christendom, are we hearing it right?

Mark's version's day ends in anticlimax in v.11
Jesus barely scouts the temple, returns to Bethany
without any action or statement of conflict

Can you resist harmonizing the other gospel accounts?
This briefest of the gospels, perhaps the earliest,
invites questions of why others added bits,
or why this evangelist found them unnecessary!