

2016 Call Day Sermon
Isaiah 50:4-9
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What would you like to hear today? There are probably as many answers to that question as there are people here. Did you hear the babies? Did you see all the little ones running around before the service? I'm guessing there's more than one grandma wanting to hear that they will be close by. People from calling congregations want to hear who their next pastor will be. All you graduates want to hear first of all that you will receive a call. Some might want to hear a faraway state or even a different country after his name. I'll bet there are moms and dads here who don't want to hear that.

What would you like to hear today? Again, there are probably as many answers to that question as there are people here today. It is good to see so many of you. It's good because it shows that you care about this school and the men who study here. And I know that your interest goes far beyond today's curiosity about where someone might be assigned, about **where** these men will start their ministries. Your interest and love and encouragement is much more about the fact that they **are entering** the ministry-- that the Lord is raising up and sending out men who are fit and willing to serve him and his church.

What would you like to hear on a day like today? A day when the most eagerly awaited words aren't those of the preacher but rather those that will be spoken by President Schroeder in a few moments? Let's pause to think about the ministry these young men are entering and remember that ministry is service. The minister is a servant, to God and to his people. Brothers about to be assigned, let's turn those questions from the "where" and the "to whom" of service and rather ask **HOW CAN I BEST SERVE?** Let's look to our Savior as the model of perfect service and see that in him you too can serve with willing obedience and with certain confidence.

Hear the Word of the Lord: **Is 50:4 The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. 5 The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away. 6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. 7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. 8 He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! 9 It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who will condemn me?**

Who is speaking in our lesson? It's the servant of the Lord. We meet him several times in Isaiah's prophecy. We know from the revelation of scripture and the proof of history that this servant is Jesus. While the verses before us are perhaps not so familiar, others that speak of the servant are:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations." And from Isaiah 53, " He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

Now let's jump into the middle of our lesson to understand more about the servant's obedience: **5 The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away. 6 I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.**

In the OT **hearing** is synonymous with **obeying**. Jesus is the obedient servant. He does not resist. He doesn't turn away from the job he has to do. He doesn't hesitate to speak for God even when that would invite abuse. That's what it seems like here. All the obedient servant did was speak the words he had been instructed to speak and now he's offering his back for beating, his face for mockery and spitting.

The obedient servant doesn't walk an easy path. This is a fact you will encounter in ministry. While it shouldn't be surprising if the unbelieving world mocks you, sometimes the abuse comes from those who consider themselves believers and it is disheartening and

discouraging. But it's a fact of life from the time Cain killed Abel, when jealous brothers sold Joseph into slavery, to when Paul was beaten and imprisoned because of his faith. And it continues today – our Sudanese Christian brothers and sisters are slaughtered and enslaved, Christians in Iraq and Afghanistan are imprisoned and worse, and right here in our country the faithful servant can expect to encounter absolute scorn and disdain from people who have no use for God.

This is not an appealing thought for the would-be pastor on the day he is being called to full-time ministry, is it? It makes you think. Even after all these long years of preparation, you perhaps wonder: Am I ready? Do I measure up to the demands of the road ahead? Can I obey the call of the Gospel in the face of the world's scorn and contempt? Will I be an obedient servant?

Again, look to our servant: **The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.**

Jesus the obedient servant talks about himself as if he were a student, a learner. Jesus has a well-instructed tongue, taught by the Sovereign LORD himself. The teaching is continuous, every day, morning by morning. I don't often think of Jesus that way, but wasn't that true in his life? Think of the young Jesus, about his Father's business in the Temple, learning as he asked questions, but also teaching. Think of how Jesus sought instruction and refreshment as he regularly withdrew from the crowds to spend hours in meditation and prayer with his heavenly Father.

The teaching and Jesus' learning had purpose. **To know the word that sustains the weary.** Sounds like the work of a pastor, doesn't it? Often when we think of Christ's work we think primarily of that priestly work of giving himself as a sacrifice so that all could be saved. Here we are pointed to Christ's work as a prophet - as a preacher and teacher - his preaching that opened up the mysteries of God to the people he met and spoke with. Remember his ministry. He always had the right word at the right time: with the hard truth of the law to the unbelievers and the proud, but truly gentle and inviting to the weary, with those burdened by sin who knew their need for a Savior.

You too have well-instructed tongues, instructed in the only word that sustains the weary. And even though you leave this place of teaching and learning tomorrow, you take that word with you wherever you will go and you will continue to learn from it daily, morning by morning. You will experience the real joy of sharing that word. Of bringing the peace of the Gospel to guilt ridden hearts and sin ravaged lives. Yes there will be difficult times. But certainly not as difficult as Jesus faced. Because of him you can serve with willing obedience, and you can also serve with certain confidence.

The Servant says: **Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.**

Confident of God's help the servant knows he will not be disgraced in the end. He knows that his choice of perfect obedience is the right choice. Others may say he is a fool, but he can go forward, his face set like flint, with resolute confidence because the LORD helps him. The LORD **helps** him! That word "help" just isn't big enough when we realize everything it entails.

He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Who is my accuser? Who will condemn me? God vindicates the servant – that is he declares him free from all the accusations of his enemies, declares him just and righteous. And the servant then asks "If God himself is my lawyer and judge, who can possibly win a legal dispute with me?" Of course the answer is no one. And that is exactly what we would expect, isn't it? That Christ, the perfect servant of the Lord, will stand before the judgment of his god vindicated and justified. We expect that of our Savior. But where does that leave us?

You know the answer. Because of Christ's perfect obedience in life and into death God also vindicates all who believe in Christ. The Apostle Paul declares this so beautifully in his letter to the Romans, echoing our very words from Isaiah:

If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

That's what we want to hear today, isn't it? What we need to hear today and everyday. So moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, wives, sweethearts – especially you brothers about to be assigned – whatever you do hear in the next minutes, know that it is the right thing for you. And following the example of the perfect servant Jesus Christ, go obediently and confidently into the ministry to which you are called. Not with blind obedience, but rather educated obedience, because you know and love your teacher and are daily nourished by his word. Not with empty confidence that rests on your achievements and abilities, but with the certain confidence that the Sovereign LORD is always near and he helps you. AMEN.