

## Session Four

### Questions for Discussion

- Why do you think early Christians developed devotional exercises such as the Stations of the Cross? What can you imagine feeling as you followed behind someone carrying a cross along the Via Dolorosa?
- In what ways are we still presented with the opportunity to confront our culture by choosing the way of love (Jesus) or the way of violence (Barabbas)?
- If you had been at Jesus' trial, which character would you most likely identify with: Pilate? The crowd? Barabbas?
  - Why do you think the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) show Jesus choosing not to speak in defense of himself?
  - How do you explain the connection between Jesus' suffering and the world's salvation? What about the doctrine(s) of the Atonement do you struggle to comprehend?
  - Considering our world today, what kind of messiah would people choose? Whom would you choose? Why?

### Bible Study and Discussion

Isaiah 52:13 See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. <sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were astonished at him-- so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals-- <sup>15</sup> so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

53:1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. <sup>9</sup> They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. <sup>11</sup> Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The Gospels seem to suggest that Jesus saw a connection between his suffering and Isaiah's vision of the "suffering servant." The early church also made that connection. Reflect on how those words support or give meaning to the story of Jesus' suffering. (See also Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9)

John 18:28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." <sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." <sup>32</sup> (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) <sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and

asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"<sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"<sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."<sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."<sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him.

Compare Jesus' response to Pilate in John's account with the near silence in the Synoptic accounts.

Acts 3:11 While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.<sup>12</sup> When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"<sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.<sup>14</sup> But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you,<sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.<sup>16</sup> And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.<sup>17</sup> "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.<sup>18</sup> In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.<sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,<sup>20</sup> so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus,<sup>21</sup> who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.<sup>22</sup> Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.'<sup>23</sup> And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.'<sup>24</sup> And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days.<sup>25</sup> You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, 'And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'<sup>26</sup> When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." Acts 8:26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.)<sup>27</sup> So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship<sup>28</sup> and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it."<sup>30</sup> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"<sup>31</sup> He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.<sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth."<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"<sup>35</sup> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.<sup>36</sup> As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.<sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

In this sermon, Peter twice uses the term "servant" to refer to Christ and refers to the prophet's prediction that this man would suffer. The Scripture Philip explains to the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the "suffering servant" passages in Isaiah. Why do you think it was so important for the first Christians to acknowledge an Old Testament context for Jesus' suffering and death?

#### In Perspective – Inside the Mind of Barabbas

Imagine that you are a criminal, guilty of murder and sedition. You have just been set free because someone you have never met is about to be crucified in your place. What are you thinking? What will you do next?