

## What Are You Ashamed of?

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49

## We Are Seeking a Way Out

If you are in social media, you may not only follow friends or colleagues. Some of you may follow celebrities, musicians, famous pastors, or things relevant for you. There is a person named Laura (@loewhaley, 3 million followers). She calls herself “Your virtual work bestie,” because she gives free trainings and advice on how you behave, advocate yourselves, or say something in a workplace in a correct way. There was one content series that went viral and made her famous. It’s called “How Do You Professionally Say?” It’s where she teaches people to say something that help escape difficult moment.

I’ll give some examples, and you will rate whether it’s good or not:

1. How do you professionally say, “I need to get a raise”? => “As my role has expanded since joining the company, i would like to review my compensation so that it better reflects my evolved responsibilities.”
2. How do you professionally say, “Oh, i’m not staying late to deal with this.” => “My workday concludes at 5, but i would be happy to prioritize this first thing tomorrow.”
3. How do you professionally say, “That sounds like a you problem!” => “I believe that falls within your scope of responsibilities, but i am happy to support as needed.”

It’s funny, right? But i wondered why those “professional” answers have gone viral, and many people enjoyed it. And i realize one thing: Isn’t it just the nature of human being? We, human, if we are in a difficult position or encounter dilemma, we just want to get out as quickly as possible. When we feel ashamed of something we always hide, and afraid to be humiliated, we quickly find a way to cover it up. It’s almost like our second nature. We always try to find a “*way out*” for ourselves. I hope today’s sermon can give us a glimpse of reason of why seeking a *way out* may not be the first thing to do as a Christian.

## Jesus, The Good Servant

This week, we are entering what the church calls “the liturgy of the Lord’s passion.” It is the moment in which we meditate upon Jesus’ suffering, as the gospel writes present to us various moments right after Jesus entered the Jerusalem: final meal, betrayal, arrest, trials, and culminating in the drama of the cross. PCUSA lectionary draws our attention to the texts

that we already read and Luke's gospel, that we didn't read today (Lk. 22-23). And from Luke's perspective, this is not just about Jesus' suffering, but also about us being in solidarity with Jesus' suffering by paying attention to people's struggle and poor experience. And we must remember that Luke is a doctor who served many kinds of people, and almost all narratives in his gospel and, later, the Act highlight those who are poor, being neglected, women, and those who are accused sinner. When they argued among themselves about who is the greatest, Luke notes how Jesus says, "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk. 22:27). How is it, then, to be in solidarity with Jesus' suffering in our times? I believe it's not that we must be like Jesus, to be persecuted to death because of our faith. At least we here are not experiencing that situation. Many people out there do. But how is it? What it means to suffer like Jesus?

Today we read 2 different songs. Isaiah 50, particularly the verse that we read, is a poem about what was traditionally called "Servant Songs." There are four of those songs scattered in the book. To put in context, this song was powerful for early readers because of their historical context. They were in the Babylonian Exile, beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem and lasting until Cyrus's decree. Cyrus was a Persian Empire, and his policy of allowing exiled peoples to return and rebuild their sanctuaries was a crucial turning point for them. And who is this servant for the readers has always been interesting. It can be a metaphor of a good Israel, Isaiah himself, even Cyrus, or others. But even though we cannot agree about who this song talks about *historically*, we know that the Jewish community living in the exile *believed* in one central figure who would sacrifice himself for their redemption.

One important thing to highlight is that the servant does not suffer *passively*. He *actively* chose to accept the consequences of speaking to truth. He says, "The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard" (Is. 50:5-6). Similarly, Paul depicts Jesus as one who actively takes the suffering. "He did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself" (Php. 2:6-7). So, this servant, both in the minds of exiled communities and early Christians, is taking the consequences of his own standpoint of obedience. Where was the last time we saw ourselves, instead of being busy to escape or to cover up our shame, we were *actively* being obedient?

Jesus' passion story can easily be seen as a way our story. What i mean by "*Way out story*" is that "I need to be saved, but i can't do it myself. So, somebody must die for my sin and replace my position. That's it." Again, we human beings tend to look for a way out of our problem. Theologian Harvey Cox says: We like to *extricate* ourselves, and "heaven" seems to

be the final point of such an extrication. This kind of reading betrays Jesus' description of Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." So, we have to be careful of merely picturing Jesus as a way. Don't forget that Jesus is the truth and the life itself. It's like if we take a Septa, see it as a way to go to the shopping mall. And once we arrive at the destination, what we do? We say, "Thank you, i arrive right now." That's a wrong interpretation of Jesus' story. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor who lived under the regime of Nazi, the author of *The Cost of Discipleship*, says that it's a cheap grace. We want to enjoy the benefit, but not the consequence. Instead, the story of Jesus' suffering and death is a story of a "costly grace." "It is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ" and follow the life and truth He embodies.

The good servant didn't just cry for a way out. Neither did Jesus in the entire passion narrative. When Jesus was brought to Pilate, and this is the last moment where Jesus could have justified Himself. There, people accused Him with many things: "Subverting our nation. Anti-government. Claiming to be Messiah. Opposes paying taxes." (Lk. 23:1). As gospel writers tell us, we know that those things were not true. They already tested Him before related to tax, and now they used His words against Himself (Mt. 22:17). It's not the issue related to government stuff. Also, paying taxes or even contributing to the economy wouldn't lead to Jesus suddenly being considered harmless or a good citizen. We see this today, too. Because Jesus was so *untypical*, they just wanted to punish Him so bad that they tipped the government and used anything possible. Did Jesus simply try to find a way out of? No, because He knows deeper, way deeper than everyone, even Peter who didn't want him to be captured, or Judas who believed that Jesus will bring about a revolution. Jesus knows His Abba, deeper than anyone. Extrication is not the first in the mind of Good Servant.

### **Who Is in the Car with You?**

Many of you know that I didn't have a car until last year. So, basically, I am a new driver—thanks to Omar who taught me once. But because I realized that I needed to learn more, I went to a course, and I was taught by a driving teacher who sat to my right, about three meetings before finally taking the driver's license test. Well, I thought, driving in the United States is easy, because there are more rules and regulations than the city where I grew up. 4 stops are regulated, everything is regulated. But there is one that my driving teacher calls a "judgment turn." It's when you're at a red light and have to turn left, but the car in the lane ahead is also moving. You have to go forward, although usually the rule is to stay behind

the zebra crossing. But you have to wait until the car from the opposite direction gives way or at least you have enough space. But you shouldn't take too long either, because from the left, they can get annoyed that you're covering their lane. The first time I did it, I panicked. The front was far away, but I was too scared. And the one behind wanted to make a judgment turn too and ended up honking. And I knew that the one on the left was about to go, so I was afraid of being honked at too. So I accelerated, because I was panicking, so I could get out of the situation. And my teacher then talked to me before continuing the training, and he said "The first thing you have to do is to listen to me! I also have a steering wheel, and I know what to do." I forgot that i had him in the car.

Imagine how it feels to be in such a position our life, where we are trapped in a place with all the eyes watching us, being suspicious because of our past mistakes, scrutinizing our every move or gestures. When we are accused of being harmful or guilty. Our family, who supposed to be kind to us, but instead betrayed us. When our back is against the wall. To be pushed to say something to defend ourselves, but we don't know what to say. In that very moment, our heart painfully cries and just want God to magically show a way out. "Please Lord. Anything possible. Help from friend. Colleagues. Family. Additional bonus. New job offers. Anything that i can consider as your mercy. Just get me out of this!" And we might forget what our Father wants to teach us in that very moment.

At the beginning, i ask, "What it means to suffer like Jesus?" To suffer like Jesus does not mean letting we be embarrassed. Or, to burden ourselves with all the problems as many as possible. We shouldn't fall into a false consciousness, that "I suffer more than anybody, then i am a better servant." That's not what God wants either. But to suffer like Jesus is to know first that finding a way out should not be the main concern. It is first and foremost to find our source of courage, source of confidence. The Good Servant in Isaiah says, "Where are my accusers? Let them appear! See, the Sovereign Lord is on my side!" (Is. 50:8b-9a). He seems to already find his source of courage, doesn't he, even if people around him may never understand. To suffer like Jesus is to *actively* return to the Father and ask Him the courage, so it will proceed not according to our will, that is so fearful, panicking, selfish, but according to our Father's will, that is true, loving, and life-giving.

The good news is: We are not alone. God is always with us. He is Immanuel, not just in the manger, but in the triumphant walk, in the suffering, and in our darkest time, as He Himself experienced in the cross. Next time, remember who is with you in the car.