

## How to Sustain the Weary with a Word? Isaiah 50.4

Rev Reg Weeks 9 April 2017

(words in red indicate a change of Pp slide)

Well I guess I don't need to tell you what day this is.

It is a very familiar story and I'm sure we are all pretty confident that we

know what happened that day. The story is in each of the four Gospels, but interestingly they each seem to have a slightly different take on it, so I thought I would share with you the summary which I found in the very comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible.



### **Jesus's entry into Jerusalem ~ Dictionary of the Bible**

The road to Jerusalem from Jericho rises 1300 feet by a long and sometimes precipitous ascent of 27 km. (about as long as from here to Upper Hutt). Following this route Jesus and his followers in due course reached the outskirts of Jerusalem. Entrance to the city was made by way of Bethphage, a suburb that appears to have been located on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives. According to Mark those who had travelled with Jesus hailed him on his entry as the herald who had proclaimed "the coming kingdom of our father David."

Matthew and Luke reinterpret the tradition as an acclamation of Jesus as Messiah, and Matthew emphasized the fact that the entry was in literal fulfilment of the messianic prophecy of Zechariah chapter 9.

However, Matthew misunderstood the poetic parallelism of the old Testament text and consequently gave an absurd picture of Jesus mounted on an ass and a colt.

John represents the welcomers as pilgrims who had already been in the city for some time. He substitutes "branches of palm trees" for Mark's "leafy branches" as the carpet spread on the road. He agrees with Mark and Luke that the event was a messianic welcome, and with Matthew that it was a fulfilment of Zechariah chapter 9

As I have noted over the past two months, Matthew has a particular concern to address Jewish readers and has not only wanted to stress that Jesus is a prophet greater than Moses, he is in fact that longed-for

Messiah prophesied by Zachariah -not the all-conquering warlord riding a white charger, but a prince of peace, in fact the Prince of Peace, his humble mount and the palm fronds historic symbols of his mission.

But as I read all the scriptures set down for the day, my mind was caught by a phrase from the Isaiah reading -

“ **that** I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.”

It was not altogether clear to me why this passage had been chosen for today as there seemed little in it that related to Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem. However, it is one of the four passages from the prophet Isaiah known as the Songs of the Suffering Servant. Jewish readers understand these passages to refer to Israel, and particularly her time of exile in Babylon, but from the earliest of times have been seen by Christians to be speaking of Jesus. In this sense the passage is a fitting perspective on that fateful week which begins today.



And if there was ever a group who were weary, it was those in Jerusalem so heartily sick of the long and oppressive occupation by their Roman overlords. It was as if they were still in exile, even in their own country.

But this all begs the question:

**who** might we regard as being “the weary” today?

Several groups come to mind:

[expand on these ad lib]

Those long in suffering

Those long in years

Those long in well-doing

Those long in the current stage of their life

Those who are parenting



All this raises a deeper question:

How to find the word that sustains?

[Think of a phrase or proverbial saying or passage from the bible or a verse from a hymn that you have found sustains you – share]

**Then** the Isaiah passage raises the question:

How to develop the “Tongue of a Teacher”?

You listen

(as a learner ie to really understand)

You remain steadfast

(even when it’s difficult)

You rely on GOD.

So you will need a sustaining concept

of God



***Your God is Too Small*, by J. B. Phillips** exposes “the inadequate conceptions of God which still linger unconsciously in many minds, and which prevent our catching a glimpse of the true God.”

*“If it is true that there is a ‘Someone’ in charge of the whole mystery of life and death, we can hardly expect to escape a sense of futility and frustration until we begin to see what he is like and what his purposes are.” he says.*

**1) Resident Policeman.** ‘To many people conscience is almost all that they have by way of knowledge of God. Conscience is by no means an infallible guide and it is extremely unlikely that we will ever be moved to love, worship, and serve a nagging inner voice,’ he says

**2) Parental Hangover.** In this view, the conception of God is almost invariably founded upon the child’s idea of their father. It almost always goes hand in hand with fear and/or guilt.

**3) Grand Old Man.** Children often view their superiors as “old,” which carries over into a person’s conception of God.

**4) Meek-and-Mild.** ‘Why on earth do children’s hymns call Jesus ‘mild?’ Of all the epithets that could be applied to Christ this seems one of the least appropriate.’ he says

**5) Heavenly Bosom.** It is true that there is refuge and shelter in God,

but this is not pietistic escapism as if we can be free from life's troubles.

Phillips also talks about other faulty views of God:

**Managing Director**, Projected Image, Pale Galilean, God-in-a-Box, Second-Hand God, Perennial Grievance, and a few others.

In the second half of the book he gives a constructive – biblical – explanation of the nature of God

Well the Bible has many words from God and quite a few about God. Genesis, in a series of word-pictures and stories, begins to develop our understanding of God as Creator – and it is science which has shown us the incredible diversity of creation, from the minute to the mind bogglingly vast. From small, beyond the reach of an electron microscope, to the farthest reaches of space.

Some may remember the **Voyager** space craft that was launched in 1977. About 3.5 years ago in Sept. 2013, after traveling for 35 years it had just got to the outer reaches of our galaxy. It is travelling at such a speed that it could circle the earth at sea level, one and a half times every hour. Travelling at that speed it will take Voyager 40,000 years to reach a star in the next galaxy.



“When I look at the stars” David said, impressed by the vastness of the firmament – but he had no idea!

In the Gospels, Jesus himself asks the question “Who do you say that I am? And the Gospels respond that Jesus is the Redeemer – the living manifestation of God’s love in action.

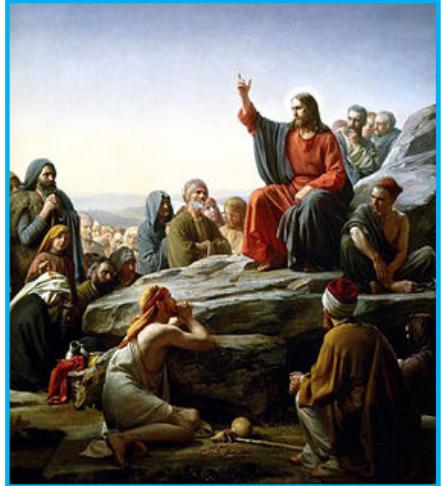
In the book of Acts it is Peter on the day of Pentecost who tells the crowd that what they are witnessing is the out pouring of God’s Spirit as promised by the prophet Joel. - the indwelling empowering Spirit

So although the Bible doesn't contain the word 'Trinity' Christians have found plenty to justify their understanding of God as Three in One

But if you are tempted to put all that aside as a confusing abstraction, **Jesus** himself has an astounding word for us

One of the few sayings of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels is this:  
"Anyone who welcomes you, welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Brother living near Santa Fe in New Mexico, and well known speaker on spirituality, has written a book on God as Trinity called the Divine Dance. He says this:



Richard Rohr ~ The Divine Dance (p 166)

Let me share an astounding bit of 14<sup>th</sup> century poetry by Meister Eckhart:

Do you want to know  
what goes on in the core of the Trinity?  
I will tell you  
In the core of the Trinity  
the father laughs  
and gives birth to the Son.  
The Son laughs back at the Father  
and gives birth to the Spirit.  
The whole Trinity laughs and gives birth to us.

God has done only one constant thing since the beginning of time:  
God has always, forever, and without hesitation loved "the Son," understood in this sense as *creation, material Universe, you, me* - and yes, you can equally and fittingly use "the Daughter."  
Remember, the quality of the relationship is the point, not gender or anything else.

God cannot *not* love his universally-begotten child in you, and the “part” of you that already knows and enjoys this is the indwelling Spirit.

And do you know that the flow is always in both directions?

The divine child also “creates” the Father *as father* - as any parent can attest. A parent is not truly a parent until the child returns the flow. Watch the joy or tears on a mother or father’s face when their little one first says “Mama!” or “Dada!”

It’s the universe in a moment.

Anything less than this laughter, liking, delighting, and loving – the world simply doesn’t have time for! And neither do you.

The world is now repositioned on a totally positive ground and foundation.

The bankrupt, sad storyline of guilt, shame, reward, and punishment never got Western civilization very far anyway. . . . But when you start with original blessing, life only grows bigger and always much better.

He takes a whole book to come to that conclusion and it’s worth reading

Or if your interest is in meditation, listen to what Thomas Merton, the father of the modern contemplative movement, has to say:

Thomas Merton ~ Book of Hours (p 178)

The message of hope the contemplative offers you, is not that you need to find your way through the jungle of language and problems that today surround God, but that whether you understand or not, God loves you, is present in you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you, and offers you an understanding and light which are like nothing you ever found in books or heard in sermons. The contemplative has nothing to tell you except to reassure you and say that if you dare to penetrate your own silence and risk the sharing of that solitude with the lonely other who seeks God through you, then you will truly discover the light and the capacity to understand what is beyond words and beyond explanations because it is too close to be explained. It is the intimate union in the depths of your own heart, of God's spirit and your own secret innermost self, so that you and he are in all truth one spirit.

*Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me*

So it seems to me that the answer to the question I started with – How to sustain the weary with a word is to trust the God in you; trust that relationship which binds us together as the Body of Christ every time we gather, and particularly every time we share the bread and the wine; trust that you are called and empowered to be yourself, the Word that sustains the weary whenever such a weary one knocks on your door or calls you on the phone.

Joy Cowley speaks for them in her little book

“Aotearoa Psalms” (ps 26)

What I need lord is a friend. Choose my friend carefully.

Please, no one who is going to tell me how to put my life straight, no amateur analyst or teacher, no well-meaning person who is going to "should" all over me.

I want someone to come in the door with a smile to let me know I'm valuable just as I am. There will be no advice, no expectation of change.

My friend will already know that pain is important in journey and must be travelled through.

My friend will stay beside me and hold my hand while I make my own discoveries.

And then, when this is over, Lord help me to remember two things: to say 'thank you', and to be a friend with a big smile to someone else in pain, or who is weary.

*‘Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.’ said Jesus*

So do not hesitate to **be** the word that sustains the weary