# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God’s Servant”**

**Isaiah 53:2-6**

**November 25, 2018**

The past three weeks we have been exploring the prophet Isaiah, and it has become evident through his prophecy that someone is coming. That dim and shadowy figure which has appeared occasionally in our study will this morning in our reading from the 53rd chapter step out into full view. God’s servant, the promised Messiah, is clearly the focus of the passage, and I invite you to turn with me to Isaiah 53:2-6

My servant grew up in the Lord’s presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

These five verses depict the life, death and purpose of the promised Messiah. Placed alongside the four gospels of the New Testament, they are clearly a foreshadowing of the life, death and purpose of Jesus, the Son of God. Verses two and three describe the servant’s rejection. All through his boyhood and into his manhood, Jesus was pursued by nasty cracks about his birth, claiming that he was an illegitimate son, born to a faithless woman who had broken her vow of chastity before marriage. His brothers did not believe in him, and his family was embarrassed at some of the things he said and did. He was called a drunkard and a glutton, and was said to be possessed by a demon. He became Israel’s “Public Enemy #1,” and in the weeks before his crucifixion the Pharisees offered a reward to anyone who would turn him in. Surely he was despised and rejected.

Verses four and five speak of the servant’s suffering and death. The first thing to notice is that the suffering and death of the servant was not due to anything he had done wrong, but was in fact the result of our sins. And, by taking upon himself the suffering that rightly belonged to us for our sin, and dying the death that justly should have been ours because of our disobedience, he suffered and died in our place. Look again at the phrases used to describe what happened to him because of us: “pierced for our rebellion,” “crushed for our sins,” “beaten so we could be whole,” “whipped so we could be healed.” This is what Jesus did for us.

People typically wish to make light of their acts of disobedience of God, calling them “mistakes” and explaining them away as “slip-ups.” They think of themselves as decent people, good people whose goodness, surely, God must see and be satisfied with. But, if that were the case, if our goodness is good enough, then why did Jesus have to die? [Screen: “If you are good enough to get into heaven, then why did this happen?” with picture of Jesus on the cross.]

Verse 6 tells us the purpose of Jesus’ rejection, suffering and death. All of us, every person who has ever lived or will live, all of us, without exception, have gone astray. This sad picture of sinful rebellion is here portrayed by wandering sheep. We have left the safe and sound ways of God to follow our own way. Remember the song Frank Sinatra made popular in the late 60s, “I Did It My Way”? When people hear it they think it sounds like something admirable, something everybody ought to emulate. How proud we feel that we did it “our way.” But the teaching of the Bible makes it clear that doing it “my way” is the problem, not the solution. Doing it “my way” leads to engaging in selfish behavior, giving in to temptation, pursuing personal ambition, and many other forms of sin. Since “my way” sin is the problem, what then is the solution? It is to believe the last line of verse six: “Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.”

God laid on Jesus the sins of Steve Wilbraham. And then Jesus lay down his life for the lost, straying, and rebellious “my way” sheep that is Steve Wilbraham. So that by faith in Jesus, Steve Wilbraham may be forgiven of his sin and, like Jesus, be raised from the dead into eternal life. That is why this happened [point to screen]. He died for me, and he died for you; and, when by faith we accept his death on our behalf, we are forever free from sin’s suffering and death.