

Good Friday
March 30, 2018

Grace Church, Lexington
Fr. James

Isaiah 52:13-63:12 Psalm 22 Hebrews 7:1-25 John 19:1-37

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO PROSPER?

What does it mean that Isaiah prophecies that god's servant would prosper and then goes on to describe terrible suffering and this suffering servant so weighed down by human sin, disease, emotional crushing, perversion of justice, lack of sympathy, the object of senseless violence? How is that prospering? But the prophet seems to suggest that he does. "Through him the will of the Lord will prosper." Out of his anguish he shall see light." Light suggests hope, and an end to the horrors of human perfidy, oppression and hate.

The Gospel is that age-old passion story that frames holy Week from its beginning to its end. Read on Passion Sunday it is repeated on Good Friday. Good Friday? What is good about it? Why do we call 'good' the execution day of the best man who ever walked the earth?

Somehow, the author of Hebrews saw this same violence-crowned man as one who completed all of God's action in the world, all of God's plans for his people on this sorrow-soaked day in history in the year 33 A.D. What the Levitical priesthood of Aaron could never accomplish this man accomplished. This man who is proclaimed high priest by what he suffered, proclaimed Son of God by what he suffered, proclaimed Messiah of the entire human race by what he suffered, this man was following an ancient pattern toward the accomplishment of God's plans held throughout the history of the earth and the universe that surrounds it. He was of the ancient order of Melchizedek whose order knew no beginning and no end. He fulfilled, completed, made perfect the priestly role of the Levitical priesthood even though he was no Levite, but rather from another tribe, that of David's tribe of Judah. His selection to be this long longed-for deliverer was not on the basis of physical descent or family of origin, but based on the power, says our author, of an indestructible life. He had within him such a clear conception of the will of God that all of the

perverse religious men in Israel and all of the fawning politicians in Roman service could but take his life, but could not extinguish it, for God the source of that life stood ready to rekindle it that no one should ever again question effectually whether or not evil could snuff out good, never again seriously contend that evil was more powerful than God. All they could do was their worst and their worst only served to light a fire of goodness and mercy and justice that has never and will never be put out. Out of the fire they lit by attempting to destroy goodness in the form of a singular human being has come hope for all humanity, the definitive answer to the most ancient human questions, 'What is it all about?' What is the meaning of life? Is there anything after life as we know it? And now we know, we know if we simply take by faith that that question has been answered in the life and death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. God has planned for all life that it shall return to God its source and live perpetually in the light of God's presence. We have to take it by faith because suffering and injustice, violence and greed, self-serving and God-ignoring

continues in the beautiful graced world God has given us to live in.

I was for a few minutes, listening to NPR and a physicist was talking about whether or not it was possible in this rat race of a world we live in to see the beauty of the universe in the midst of the rat race. His conclusion? “Oh, yes,” if we but take the time to listen to the bird’s song, see the flight of the butterfly, investigate the universe to be found in a grain of sand, and all of that, from his perspective, available within the simple boundaries of that discipline we call science. And I would say to you, most of that doesn’t require science. It only requires looking around us, listening around us, attending within us to the voice of God everywhere in our world. Oh, there are contending messages for sure, but if we but attend, we will know that they are insignificant beside the beauty and goodness of God’s world.

“One is reminded of an experience of Admiral Byrd at the South Pole when he was alone, quite removed from the camp base. He stood outside his hut and seemed to *hear* the harmony of creation in the vast quiet of the Antarctic twilight.

‘The day was dying, the night being born—but with great peace. Here were the imponderable processes and forces of the cosmos, harmonious and soundless. Harmony, that was it! That was what came of the silence —a gentle rhythm, the strain of a perfect chord, the music of the spheres, perhaps.

‘It was enough to catch that rhythm, momentarily to be myself a part of it. In that instant I could feel no doubt of man’s oneness with the universe. The conviction came that the rhythm was too orderly, too harmonious, too perfect to be a product of blind chance—that, therefore, there must be purpose in the whole and that man was part of that whole and not an accidental offshoot. It was a feeling that transcended reason; that went to the heart of man’s despair and found it groundless. The universe was a cosmos, not a chaos; man was a rightfully a part of that cosmos as were the day and night’” [678:18]

Did Jesus prosper? Oh, yes. It may be Good Friday, but because Jesus saw the possibilities in the midst of his own tragedy, we have the promise of new and unending life in the presence of

the source of life, the source of the universe, the source of all hope
and peace, love and joy. Oh, yes, yes, yes. *So be it.*