

Psalm 31.9-16**[Worship]**

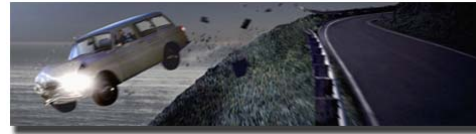
9 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. 10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. 11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. 12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. 13 For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!— as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. 14 But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." 15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. 16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Consider:**[Think & Pray...]**

Today's readings focus on the topsy-turvy values of a life lived in God's service. It seems to be a natural part of being human that we yearn for prestige, recognition, and status. Yet God's call on us is to renounce this and instead live a life of humility and gentleness.

This call is summed up in Isaiah 50:4-9, a passage that, like others in this part of Isaiah, talks of God's servant. Here Isaiah speaks of the mutuality involved in service: The servants teach in the same way as they are taught. Just as they hear God's voice, so they also teach it to others. This takes the form of sustaining the weary with a word (Isaiah 50:4). This is one of my favorite images for teaching and pastoral care. The idea that words could

provide a means of nurture and care for the weary lies at the heart of what many of us seek to do. Yet this passage goes on to say that such a ministry can bring with it suffering and humiliation.



This is best illustrated by Jesus' life. More than anyone else, Jesus fulfilled God's

calling to be a gentle, humble servant who sustained people through his words. His ministry, however, ultimately led to suffering and death. Here we encounter fully the upside-down nature of God's kingdom: a kingdom in which the king is prepared to be tried and killed by those who should be his subjects (Matthew 26:14-27:66), who takes the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7), and who refuses to exploit equality with God (Philippians 2:6).

As we approach Holy Week, we celebrate and affirm these principles of God's kingdom in which the least are the greatest, weakness is strength, and death brings life to all.

[The Scripture]**Isaiah 50.4-9a**

4 The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. 5 The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. 6 I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. 7 The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; 8 he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. 9a It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.