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## “A Strange Kind of Healing”

Isaiah 53: 1-12

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A few years ago my wife and I took a trip from Korea to Singapore. We took a short side trip from Singapore across the border to Malaysia. During the trip our tour guide talked about the fate of criminals in Singapore and Malaysia, especially those who traffic in narcotics. The fate of a drug trafficker is imprisonment with three lashes of the tail of a manta ray with a poisoned tip. Okay, I said to myself, that would probably hurt a lot. Then the tour guide said that **one** lash takes nearly a year to heal because it takes the skin from the body. As a result it could easily take three years to overcome three lashes. Just the thought of that made my insides cringe. Anyway, getting beaten in a painful, public, and humiliating way is always associated with wrongdoing. The only healing value, if one survives, is to not make the same mistake again.

After I heard all this, my mind went to Isaiah 53 where the Bible talks of the Suffering Servant who was beaten for our sins and iniquities. During this time of Lent, as we consider afresh the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that He was publicly and painfully beaten in a humiliating way. The big difference is that He did nothing to deserve it - no illegal or criminal activity. In fact, he was considered without sin. The real twist to this episode, though, is found in verse 5: **“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us *peace* was upon him, and by his wounds we are *healed*.”**

No criminal ever punished can bring healing or real peace to anyone. It can make the victims feel justice may have been served or give a sense of relief, but not healing. What the Bible says here turns this particular punishment upside down. God took everything we ever did that was worthy of punishment, and gave that punishment to the Suffering Servant - in Christianity we believe this to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is one of the most difficult stumbling blocks for us to overcome because it is so incredibly hard to believe - *it can only be accepted in faith as true*. Yet this punishment is the source of our deepest healing, because it frees us from having to punish ourselves in anticipation of God doing it. It also frees us to choose life positively because we live from the gratitude of this sacrifice rather than the fear of facing it like the drug trafficker.

This week as we march toward the Christian and Jewish holy days, I hope all of us will freshly consider the Suffering Servant. He is not a relic from 2000 years ago, but a real choice for today. Public, humiliating, and painful beatings still take place in our world. Only one had and has the power to deeply heal our lives and bring genuine peace for eternity. At some point we all end up making a choice about the meaning of Isaiah 53 for ourselves. Have a thoughtful week.