

## **Isaiah 53:1, 3-6,8**

Who could have seen the Lord's hand in this? ... We despised him and rejected him; he endured suffering and pain. ... But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment from God. But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole by the blows he received. All of us were like sheep that were lost, each of us going his own way. But the Lord made the punishment fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved. ... He was arrested and sentenced and led off to die, and no one cared about his fate. He was put to death for the sins of our people.

I thought about this passage for the first time when our Grade 11 class at Concordia College, Toowoomba, studied it using a booklet called "Great Chapters of the Bible." At the time, with my limited biblical knowledge, the thing that amazed me was simply this: How could the prophet foresee what would happen to Jesus so many hundreds of years in the future? Now, with a deeper understanding of O.T. prophecy, I ask: "Who was this servant of God who was despised and rejected and suffered and died, whose fate foreshadowed what happened to Jesus? Was it one of the prophets like Jeremiah?"

But my greater amazement these days is how clearly the prophet spells out the ultimate significance of Jesus' suffering and death. Using their big words, theologians call this Jesus' "vicarious atonement." Put more simply they are saying that what Jesus endured on that first Good Friday (Black Friday!) was in the place of and for the benefit of us sinners. Yes, Jesus was wounded because of our sins, beaten because of the evil we did, put to death for the sins of all people.

So, as the prophet goes on: "The Lord says, 'It was my will that he should suffer; his death was a sacrifice to bring forgiveness, ... and through him my purpose will succeed.'" How astounding is that? Who could have seen the Lord's hand in this?

May we truly believe it – because in that alone will we find inspiration and strength to lead that life of love, of sacrificial service of others that Jesus spoke about and demonstrated on that first Maundy Thursday.