Well today is Palm Sunday. And usually the focus at least for me has been on the welcoming of Jesus as our king. So we have Palm Waving and a big welcome. But there is nothing of that in today’s lessons. We’re now a full three chapters after that in the Gospel of Mark. And the entire focus at this point is not on the welcoming of Jesus at all, but on the rejection of Jesus.

Sometimes I think we set things up in our minds so that we can either welcome Jesus or reject him. You can either believe or not believe. Accept or reject. The choice is up to you. That’s not where I’m going here today at all. What I’m going to try to say is that unless you understand how you reject Jesus, you can’t really welcome him. Welcoming Jesus is at the same time acknowledging something about what it means to reject Jesus.

If you look at our first lesson today, you will discover exactly the same kind of approach. This is just a fascinating lesson, let’s walk through it again briefly. From Isaiah chapter 50. The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Now I think that all of us would acknowledge and welcome learning how to sustain the weary with a word. This is simply encouraging people. That’s a big part of the ministry isn’t it, learning how to encourage people. And I am sure that all us here would welcome an encouraging word ourselves this morning, and understand that to welcome God into our lives would be to welcome that encouragement. God is coming into your life to bring you a word of encouragement.

The text continues. Morning by morning he wakens---wakens my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards. So here we have the basic acknowledgment of how to learn to teach encouragementf. If I’m going to teach, I have to be a learner. In order to teach I have to know how to be taught. God isn’t going to give the lesson without helping Isaiah hear it right? This by the way, is what it means to be intelligent. To be intelligent is not about IQ or how much you know. Intelligence means that you are open to being taught. Smart people welcome being taught. People who are not very intelligent think they already know everything. They have a hard time admitting that they don’t know. So God has given Isaiah the tongue of a teacher, and now the openness to being taught how to do it. So now it’s time to go to class and learn how to sustain the weary with a word. To be an encourager. And now we’re all smart because we’re opening to listening right?

And we’re going to have to be smart. Because the lesson is not at all what any of us I’m sure would expect. How would you expect to teach someone to be an encourager? Maybe it would be class on how to be optimistic, or say nice things. Learn how to say, “You can do it!” “Don’t give up!”. You’re amazing! Be gentle, be kind, be compassionate, be patient. Send a card.

We would all acknowledge I think that all of these things would be important to learn about. But notice that’s not where the class begins at all is it? Poor Isaiah walks into class to learn how to sustain the weary with a word, and what happens? Verse 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.

Wow. Rough first day of class. How does God teach Isaiah how to be an encourager? What does he need to learn to sustain the weary with a word? Isaiah finds himself getting a beatdown. Mocked, ridiculed, held in contempt. What’s that about? What does this have to do with sustaining the weary with a word? Well, I think the reason is that in order to be an encourager, you have to experience why it is that people need encouragement. In order to really accept the weary you have to first learn how they are being rejected. Isaiah has to experience for himself what it is that is making people so weary. So discouraged. He has to encounter that rejection, that painful reality out there, the insults, the smack downs. The put downs. Maybe you’ve been to that class a few times. Did you learn? Were your ears open to being taught? See, your not going to be an encourager unless you know what it is that is discourages people. The first step to healing the pain is to know for yourself what the pain is. To experience the beat down, the insults.

This is the same class Jesus goes to today in our Gospel lesson. The primary way that Jesus is crucified in the Gospel of Mark is not the nails. Mark has very little to say about blood, or gore, or nails, or a crown of thorns, those detail go by very quickly. We emphasis the external pain, the physical pain. The crucifixion in the Gospel Mark is primarily about insults. Mark spends way more time narrating what people say than who they do. Because that’s the real killer here. The laughter and the mockery is the real crucifixion. That’s what is so darn dark. The cross is not primary this wooden thing that he is nailed to. The cross in Mark’s Gospel is the beat down. The put down’s. The laughter. The mockery.

Look at the Gospel lesson. Let’s just read what Mark is saying. “The high priests along with the religion scholars were right there mixing it up with the rest of them, having a great time poking fun at him: “He saved others….but he can’t save himself. Messiah is he? King of Isreal! Then let him climb down from the cross. We’ll all become believer then!” Even the men crucified alongside him joined in the mockery. It’s so true. Notice what immediately follows. At noon the sky became extremely dark. It wasn’t the nails that did it. It was the rejection. Let’s be real clear about how we reject God here. Masters of mockery and insults and put downs.

See before we can welcome Jesus, we better be real clear about how he is rejected. And here it’s basically at the hands of brilliant put down artists. It is true that if you are a really good comedian that you can do this in a way that is endearing. There are certain forms of put downs that are forms of connection. But the vitriol and the ugliness of our discourse and our mockery and ridicule of people because of how they look or because they’re poor or who knows. That’s how we reject Jesus. Let’s not put it in religious words today like “we sin”, or “we fail to trust”. Mark is much more concrete. The way that we can reject people is endless. The forms of put downs are infinite. That’s the darkness that affects our schools and kids and churches and social media.

So where is the encouragement? How are the weary sustained with a word? What’s interesting is that what happens next again, is not what we expect. We expect the teacher perhaps to moralize. We shouldn’t put people down. We shouldn’t be so mean. That’s the approach that is often used even in the church to deal with sin. Don’t. So I get to the end of my sermon and someone might say the lesson is don’t put people down. Watch the insults.

But that’s not really the lesson at all. Notice how the class continues in our Old Testament lesson. Remember Isaiah now is in class. And he’s been given a good beat down, a good smack down. And he’s hurting isn’t he? You can kind of see him sort of hunched over trying to stand, trying to put up the pain of what’s happened to him. He’s beat up good. His face is bloody. But the worst pain has been the insults and the mockery and the ridicule that he’s received. He’s hurting good.

But now comes the second part of the lesson. And I hope I do this right because I don’t know exactly how to say it right. But the lesson is that it’s from the hurt that Isaiah begins to understand encouragement. Where he is sustained. The lesson is that he is sustain in his weariness. In his pain. That’s what all of this is getting at. Encouragement doesn’t take it away does it? When you encouraging a person you’re not trying to say everything is Ok. It’s not optimism. Your trying to help them see that when they are hurting they can heal. That’s the insight. Most of the time when we get hurt we just hurt back. But this is God, and this is sound teaching. And what he is teaching Isaiah is the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. That hurt can be transformed into healing. You can get hurt bad. But if you can acknowledge it, experience it, own it, feel it, that’s where you begin to understand God’s encouragement. I am with you. A word that can help you heal.

So it’s a simple message this week. As we contemplate the cross of Jesus Christ this Holy week, let’s just have a simple message. As we look at Jesus, he is simply all the people of the world who have receive a good beat down by hurtful put downs, ridicule, mockery and rejection. And the God who is revealed through them as we learn to share their pain. That’s where true encouragement begins, a new heart is born, a new love received, a new life begins to be live. God is with us. Take us to class God, and help us learn. How to hurt and how to heal. Amen.