

Sermon for Sunday, April 17, 2011
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Wounded, Healed
Psalm 69:1-16

Our goal this week is to see the final week of Jesus' life afresh, through the lens of Psalm 69, which foretells many elements of the crucifixion. As we see Jesus overwhelmed by troubles, hated and scorned, then calling for grace for his foes, we should know and love him more than ever.

Albert Pujols is the best player in baseball, but from God's perspective, his faith is more important. Like all who love Jesus, he shows it by acts of kindness. In 2005, when he was twenty-five years old, he and his wife started a foundation "to honor God, to help those living with Down's syndrome" and to "improve the lives of the impoverished in the Dominican Republic." Last year he heard that a boy couldn't attend a baseball game because of brain cancer. After the game, he visited the boy in the hospital for an hour and gave him the bat he had used that night to hit his 400th home run. Pujols is quiet about these things, but people find out. Recently a prominent television program ran a biography about his good deeds. But some people said, "He's looking at a new contract after this season, so he's doing this for good publicity, to add value." Sorry, if it's for publicity, you stay five minutes, not an hour. Besides, he started his foundation six years ago. The criticism rankles. It also stings because most of us have felt the same scourge.

But the more public the person, the more likely that people will mock and criticize. Who is the most criticized person in America today? Surely Barack Obama. Before that? George Bush. Then Bill Clinton. There is envy, perversity in the human heart that moves us to find the flaws, real or perceived, in leaders and then attack. So it was with David. So it was, to the most extreme, with Jesus.

This week we focus attention on Jesus' final week of ministry. Psalm 69 will be our lens as it foretells and foreshadows the suffering of Christ. Written by King David, Psalm 69 works at three levels.

First, it is a sincere cry of distress that we can feel. Everyone can say *some* of the things David says in Psalm 69. He is in trouble because he did something foolish and sinful: "You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you" (69:5). David's troubles started with his own mistakes, but people piled on. He endured scorn, insults, mockery, public shame. Even his family turned against him.

Parts of Psalm 69 resonate. He says, "Many are my enemies without cause." We have felt the same way. We've heard people laugh, mocking us. The memory burns. Perhaps *your* family has turned on you. David says, "I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God" (69:3). So *some of David's problems are common*, but most of Psalm 69 describes his life as God's anointed. A supremely talented leader, hence a target for the envious.

The Psalm is also about Jesus. On resurrection day, Jesus surveyed the Old Testament with some disciples and said the whole Old Testament speaks of him: "Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:24-27).

Prophecies and typology

A word to seekers. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, can be hard to read at times, so let me offer a clue. Parts of the Old Testament describe history. Others record Israel's songs, prayers, and poems. But there is something universal in all of this. That's why God ensured that we recorded and saved them.

Jesus also says that the Old Testament points to him. When church people hear this, we think of specific prophecies. For example, God's deliverer must be an heir of David and born in Bethlehem. But the Old Testament speaks of Christ in another way – in patterns or types. God sent forerunners to foreshadow the things Jesus would do and say:

So Adam is a type or pattern for Christ (Rom. 5:14). A true man, an innocent man, he walked with God and represented his people – as Jesus did.

The priests pointed to Jesus too. They came into God's house, the tabernacle, and offered God gifts of thanksgiving and sacrifices for sin – as Jesus did.

The good kings of Israel led God's people well, protecting them from foes and administering justice – as Jesus did. He is the true Son of David.

The prophets told the truth for God; some performed miracles too. When people heard Jesus' words, saw his miracles, they said, "A great prophet has arisen among us" (Luke. 7:16). On Palm Sunday, the people said, "This is Jesus, the prophet." Yes, but Jesus is *more than a prophet*. All these shadows are just that – shadows. Jesus is greater than the shadows:

- More than Adam: Adam rebelled and brought death. Jesus was faithful and brought life.
- More than the priests in the tabernacle because priests sacrifice regularly, but Jesus offered one sacrifice to remove all sin, once for all.
- More than the kings. Most kings ruled selfishly all the time; all ruled selfishly some of the time. Jesus reigns in love and justice, all the time.
- More than the prophets. Jesus doesn't just tell the truth, he **is** the truth.

David is a principal forerunner of Christ. A king who loved justice and mercy, prayer and worship. He defeated foes – the Philistines - who were bent on destroying Israel. And people hated him without cause, just as some hated Jesus.

In Psalm 69, David sings the pain of betrayal, scorn, shame. He cries for help and justice. It's personal, yet his words soar past his experience. His suffering and betrayal point ahead to Jesus. Jesus quotes this psalm before his crucifixion. It foretells specific elements of Jesus' suffering and moves us to love Jesus more than ever. It begins with David overwhelmed by a sea of trouble.

1. Overwhelmed by a sea of trouble (69:1-3)

"Save me, O God," he cries, for the water is up to his neck. He can't touch bottom and he is sinking in deep water. He has cried out so long that his throat is sore. He looked for help so long that his eyes are weary.

David often cried for help. Enemy armies attacked him. Once they kidnapped his children. His own king chased him, his brothers shunned him. He hid in caves, scrounging food and water. Surely he thought: If this is the life of the chosen one, God, choose someone else.

Jesus suffered worse. The more good he did, the more hatred he endured (Matt. 12). But his suffering was most intense in his last week in Jerusalem: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb 5:7). We think of Jesus in Gethsemane, calling, "My

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt 26:38). And on the cross Jesus said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (27:46).

We cry for help too. The water runs up to our neck; *our* feet slip: Jobs disappear, cancer comes, relationships disintegrate. When the world turns against us, we are not alone, heroes like King David and King Jesus song is with us, "Save me... the floods engulf me." God answered them and he answers us.

2. Hated without a cause (69:4-6)

How did David come to his position? He says, "They hate me without reason... without cause." The more David did good, the worse things got. Before David turned twenty years old, the Philistines invaded Israel, pressing deep until Israel's army met them in the valley of Elah. The armies sat at an impasse, until each presented a champion. David fought and killed their giant, Goliath. When David toppled him with a rock, the Philistines panicked and fled. Israel won a great victory, but King Saul detected a rival: Who is this? What is his clan? Is it powerful? A threat? Should I kill him? Saul certainly tried!

Later, the Philistines invaded Keilah, a border town, to take the city and its food. David heard of the invasion and asked God if he should defend the city. God said, "Go." David defeated the Philistines, and saved Keilah. Saul heard that David was in a walled city and planned to besiege Keilah while David was inside. David asked God, "Will [Saul] come? Will the citizens whom I saved defend me or give me up to save themselves?" (23:1-11). "Sorry, David," God said, "the people will betray you." So David says they "hate me without cause."

Jesus quotes this in John 15:25. Jesus disciples often wondered: Why the hostility toward Jesus? He taught, healed and fed people; he had time for everyone. Why do *our own leaders* slander and persecute him, and us with him?

Jesus quoted Psalm 69: there is no reason. "They hated me without reason." Technically, there was a *reason* - envy. When the chief priests brought Jesus to Pilate, demanding that he crucify Jesus, Pilate sized up them: "He knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" (Mt. 27:1, 18). Envy is a reason that is no reason – resentment because someone has more friends, better luck, more money, better skills, younger skin. No reason. Mindless malice.

We know the experience: "What does he or she have against me? I don't get it." When I was a college professor, my school had a professor who was our leading intellectual. A true polymath, a warm, generous man, he could intelligently discuss any topic. But at faculty gatherings, a few professors didn't just discuss, they attacked. "Prove him wrong! Knock him down! He's no better than we are." That is irrational envy.

Of course, if you go deep, there is *some* reason. Maybe that professor, athlete, leader, scientist, lawyer is a bit arrogant or vain. That's why David has to admit, "They hate me without reason," and "You know my folly, O God." David did foolish things – while running from Saul, as a husband, as a father, even it seems, as a little brother (so his brothers say in 1 Sam. 17:28).

When people are cruel or critical with *me* without reason, I respond two ways: First: this is so ridiculous, unfair, why do they do this? Second, "Of course, they *could* be angry at me for *another reason, if they knew.*" I have no shortage of failures. We're all the same. Everyone but Jesus should confess this. Jesus does *not* sing the confession of sin in Psalm 69, for he was sinless. No one ever convicted him of sin" (John 8:46).

3. Wounded by scorn and insults

David sang, "Lord, I endure scorn for your sake... I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me." David did endure scorn and mockery, and alienation for his zeal for God's house. When he brought the tabernacle to Jerusalem, he wrote songs, choirs sang, hosted a feast, and danced before the Lord with all his might. And his wife despised him for that (2 Sam. 6).

Some of us experience scorn and mockery. I'm visible enough to experience this. Strangers occasionally stop me and thank me for a talk or for a book. But I also receive anonymous hate mail. On the internet, people distort my words, then attack what I did not say. It's hurts, but Jesus endured far worse and empathizes.

Hebrews says Jesus is "like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest." He can "sympathize with our weaknesses. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb 2:17, 4:15-16).

Do you know that? You can lean on Jesus in your misery because he gets it, better than anyone, he understands unjust suffering. You can turn to him.

Pilate had enough experience to see that Jesus was an innocent man. When a crowd, led by the priests, cried, "Crucify him," Pilate replied, "*Why? What crime* has he committed?" And they shouted "Crucify him." That's not an answer. They named no crime, no reason. When Pilate asked "Why?" they simply shouted in rage (27:18-23). Pilate capitulated and ordered his death. Soldiers dressed him in a scarlet robe, jammed a crown of sharp thorns on his head and bowed, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews" (27:27-31). When they tired of this game, "they spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again" (27:29b-30).

The crowds, the religious leaders, the Romans, even the criminals crucified beside Jesus, mocked him. They thought, "If he were who he says he is, how can he be here, cursed and crucified, helpless and defeated, abandoned by his disciples and cursed by his God?" They think, "No Messiah, no king, could die this way!" They think Jesus' crucifixion proves him an imposter. So "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God'" (27:38-40).

Yet as they mocked him they told some truth unknowingly. They said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (27:41-42). Well Jesus *had* saved others from disease and their lost condition. But now if he was to save others spiritually and eternally, he could not save himself from the cross.

He could have come down from the cross, because he is the Son of God. He could have come down to demonstrate his power, to knock some sense into the scoffers. If we had Jesus' power, but not his character, we probably would knock some sense into them. But Jesus stayed on the cross, to redeem our fallen race. For our sake, he let them mock, let them think they knew it all.

Psalm 69 describes the scorn David endured, a scorn all humans sometimes face. Psalm 69 teaches us how to endure unjust insults. More than that, it points to Christ. His suffering is greater than ours and the reason runs deeper. We always deserve *some* criticism; Jesus deserved nothing but praise. That's unique and it reveals a perversity in the human heart.

Sometimes we admire what is good, true, righteous and praiseworthy, but sometimes we envy it, even hate, simply because it makes us feel bad. Consider the compliment, "That's *sick*." It means "Unbelievable. How did you *do* that?" Yet "sick" implies that something is wrong, so it keeps its distance....

Big idea: *Jesus bore the brunt of envy, malice, lust for power, and other evils.* But he didn't just bear the brunt. On the cross, he bore the penalty for those evils. On the cross, he endured the punishment for some of the very people who tormented him. He prayed, "Father forgive them." We'll have more on that in a moment. First, let's look at the call for rescue – from David, from us, from Jesus.

4. Calling for rescue, judgment and grace

In his distress, David called on God, as everyone should. "Rescue me, deliver me from those who hate me. Answer me... Do not hide your face... Redeem me" (69:14-18). Scorn has broken my heart. I looked for sympathy, but there was none... They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar [sour wine] for my thirst (69:20-21). This is David's lament, but you may recognize elements of Jesus' crucifixion. All four gospels cite this passage in their accounts of the crucifixion.

John notes that when Jesus said, "I thirst" someone offered him a sponge dipped in vinegar or sour wine. That was small comfort for a terribly thirsty man, but perhaps it gave Jesus just enough moisture to call out, "It is finished" (John 19:28-30). Luke says the soldiers who mocked Jesus gave him sour wine moments later. So the wine isn't compassion, it's cruelty.

Biggest idea: at this point, after David says, "They gave me sour wine for my thirst," Psalm 69 calls for judgment, retribution, as the psalms often do. David says "Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted" (69:24-25). There is a place for this call for justice and judgment.

Jesus is soaked in the psalms; he knows them front and back, he quotes them more than anything. But Jesus breaks with Psalm 69 just here. Instead of, "They give me vinegar for my thirst. Pour out your wrath" he says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Not wrath, mercy.

Again the call for justice is proper. As the disciples puzzled over Judas' betrayal of Jesus, they came to Psalm 69, "May his place be deserted." They decided it applied and chose someone to take Judas's place. So the call for justice is fair, but Jesus' call for grace – "Father, forgive them" – is greater. This is no cheap grace, no grace that ignores sins. No this is costly grace, for Jesus bore the very sins of his tormentors, that he may utter this blessed prayer.

5. Praising God for deliverance

As Psalm 69 continues, David's mood turns. He asks for God's protection one last time. "O God protect me" – and that last prayer leads to confidence. "I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving... [for] the LORD hears the needy" (69:29, 33).

Again, Jesus took part in this final word of confidence. How amazing – Jesus' time on the cross ended with confidence. From "My God, why have you forsaken me," and "I thirst," he closes with assurance, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

We can follow the same path. Overwhelmed by troubles? Hated without a cause? Wounded by scorn? Calling for rescue? We have been there.

We are a church of broken achievers. This is a passage, a moment, for broken achievers. We like to have life under control. We have goals and plans. We don't like people or events that disrupt us. We are hard workers, even perfectionists. Then we stumble. Our career turns the wrong way. Our child is born... with problems. We slip, whether literally or metaphorically.

I lost my voice completely for eight days and could barely talk for eight to ten more. My voice is essential to my plans. I felt like a trombonist who learns that every trombone has disappeared. My instrument, my voice is gone, now what? I'm not *in control* any more. The water is rising, my feet are slipping. With David, we feel overwhelmed, hated, scorned, and call for help. We keep calling, like David.

God hears. Jesus hears. He took our flesh, so he empathizes with us and redeems us. During "Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers... with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." Now he is "the source of eternal salvation," our priest and friend, interceding for us. So he bears our grief and burdens. He heals wounds and sins. He rescues us, so praise him, and yes, prepare to take a blow with him. But if we suffer with him, we taste glory too, and we learn to love him all the more.