

LEARN TO FACE LIFE WITH FAITH  
SIXTEENTH SUN. AFTER PENTECOST

ISA 50:4-10  
SEPT 13, '15

<sup>4</sup> The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught,  
that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary.

Morning by morning he awakens;

he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord GOD has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.

<sup>6</sup> I gave my back to those who strike,  
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;

I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

<sup>7</sup> But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.

<sup>8</sup> He who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

<sup>9</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?  
Behold, all of them will wear out like garment;  
the moth will eat them up.

<sup>10</sup> Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant?  
Let him who walks in darkness and has no light  
trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

According to author Robert Fulghum,

All I really needed to know I learned in kindergarten.

So, even though school seems to have started late this year,  
even for kindergarteners, the pressure is on.

I think this claim is a bit exaggerated, but it is true  
that one learns more in school than academics.

I remember thinking in school that reason teachers assigned  
more work than I could possibly get done  
was to prepare me for same thing after I got a job.

In school, we learn to juggle multiple assignments,  
at same time learn to deal with other difficulties,  
how to cooperate, share and wait,  
and how to get along with bullies and other difficult people.

Especially in Lutheran day schools and Sunday school,  
students learn more than just what is on the test.

They learn to face tests of faith and temptations of Devil.

According to text, these are things we keep on learning  
and they are learned from God and his word.

WE KEEP BEING WEARIED BY WEAKNESS  
WE LEARN TO FACE SCORN WITH CONFIDENCE  
JESUS TAKES ON WEAKNESS FOR US

WE KEEP BEING WEARIED BY WEAKNESS

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Last week I asked students at our school what books they read  
over the summer. One said "Diary of a Wimpy Kid."

This book seems to appeal to kids of many ages.

I should read it because I remember being whimpy kid.

Even as adults we continue to have experiences  
that make us feel like being back in school being picked on.

This was apparently true of Isaiah.

He claims to know how to sustain the weary  
because of things he himself has learned.

And continues to learn every morning and every day.

One who has struggled to learn is often the best teacher.

I think weariness he speaks of is not just being physically tired  
from hard work but emotional fatigue.

This happens because of weakness, both ours and others'.

Isaiah speaks of being struck in the face.

I hope this doesn't happen to us physically,

but today's Epistle speaks of power of words for good & bad.

Whether intentionally or not, we continually encounter words  
that expose our weaknesses and make us feel weaker,  
unattractive, ignorant, clumsy, making mistakes, inadequate  
unlovable or even evil.

Those these words come from may seem to be superior,  
strong, intimidating, capable and confident.

but why do they have to flaunt this by pointing out  
flaws in our appearance, character or behavior?

Often it is because of their own weakness: their insecurity,  
uncertainty & fears they want to hid from others & selves

Like us, they may feel unsightly, uncertain, unloved, needy.

This is dirty little secret of most bullies & pushy people.

The urge to attack or destroy what is different or disliked  
rather than patient reasoning or helping is sign of weakness.

When our behavior, thoughts or opinions differ from them,  
the implication something may be wrong with them is threat  
from which they must defend themselves.

They must fight either literally or with words.

They must parade their pride, even in shameful things  
or kill those who believe differently  
or shout that those who disagree with them are stupid  
and belittle others with scorn,  
to silence or drown out voices of doubt in own heads.

So Isaiah, what is the good word?

How shall we respond when we are wearied and weak?

Especially when it may be our Christian belief & behavior  
that is being scorned, as it was for Isaiah?

Shall we shout back louder or push back harder? No, but...

### WE LEARN TO FACE SCORN WITH CONFIDENCE

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Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.

Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

Isaiah, like other prophets, likes double meanings.

When he says in v. 5, "God has opened my ear,"  
it can mean God made him listen, but also means more.

According to O.T. law, if one has been indentured slave,  
working certain number of years to repay a debt,  
when time comes for them to go free, if they chose instead  
to remain as servant in household of their master,  
their ear is pierced, literally, their ear is "opened,"  
to show that they willingly submit to their master.

This is how we learn the wisdom that sustains the weary,  
when ears are opened to willing submission to God as Lord.

Why should I care about criticism or scorn or even threats  
of others who may belittle my beliefs or behavior.

I am not living my life to please them.

I can respectfully debate but do not have to fight in fear  
because my security & self worth comes not from them  
but from God who is my Lord.

Who will contend with me? Isaiah asks.

If they have a problem, they can take it to my boss.

To avoid having a persecution complex & being overly sensitive  
we should realize that we will not be scorned or abused  
just because we are Christians.

In this world, it happens to everyone no matter what.

But if we are going to be scorned anyway,  
it may as well be for what is true and right.

So, Isaiah says, I don't pull back, either from submission to God  
or from scorn of others or from own sense of shame  
or failure that would make me oversensitive  
because he who vindicates me is near.

It is what God says about me & does for me that counts.

We can face opposition without flinching, set our face like flint,  
not because we don't care about other people  
but because we know God takes care of all of us.

And so we can say, even to adversaries, "Come near"  
and let me share with you what I have learned:

#### JESUS TAKES ON WEAKNESS FOR US

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and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;

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<sup>9</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Behold, all of them will wear out like garment;  
the moth will eat them up.

<sup>10</sup> Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the voice of his servant?  
Let him who walks in darkness and has no light  
trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.

I remember from Junior High that one of the kids who was worst  
for picking on others and saying mean things

was a skinny little kid (which fits in with pattern of bullies)  
so why did others let him get away with it?

because he was just mouthpiece for big friend ready to fight.

The big bully behind every mean mouth in our lives is the Devil.

he is the one who wants to intimidate & declare us guilty.

He works through anyone & anything he can to convince us  
that we are worthless and helpless and hopeless

and especially that God doesn't love or care about us.

His goal is not just to make our lives miserable

but to destroy our faith and so ruin eternal life.

But fortunately, we have a buddy standing with us  
who is even bigger and tougher than the devil - Jesus.  
Ultimately, the words of our text that sustain the weary  
are not just Isaiah's words or words we have learned to say  
but the words of Jesus.

He is the servant who willingly submitted to God's will  
and did not pull back from scorn, striking or disgrace.  
he willingly made himself weak for our sake  
and gained from experience what sustains the weak.

He deliberately set his face toward the cross  
where he was declared guilty of our flaws and failures  
in order to take away our shame & suffering & death.

But then, as he says in v. 9, God helped him.  
He was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven,  
having left all our sins in the dust.

This is why he who vindicates me is near.  
He contradicts all condemnation and criticism  
by his word of forgiveness and love.

I can deal with my weaknesses not by covering them up  
or compensating with criticism of others but confession,  
and then he declares me good by his grace.

Here in our worship and in our school we come to the one  
who heals us and our children and helps our unbelief.  
we listen to the voice of God's servant  
and hear the word that sustains the weak and weary.

In baptism he claims us as his own dear children.

In Holy Communion he sends us forth in peace.

We are given strength and power by the word of Jesus  
that gives us worth and hope and help.

#### **WE KEEP BEING WEARIED BY WEAKNESS**

both our own weakness and the weakness of others  
who emphasize ours in attempt to minimize their own.

#### **WE LEARN TO FACE SCORN WITH CONFIDENCE**

We learn to care for others without caring how they treat us  
because our confidence is not based on them or selves  
but on what God says and does for us.

#### **JESUS TAKES ON WEAKNESS FOR US**

He has willingly submitted to serving us by taking our shame  
and our sin and fear and death on himself  
to give us instead worth and hope and life, and,  
when all bullies are worn out, glory with him in heaven.