

1. (oops!) Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth. A famous line by the boxer Mike Tyson. I plan hymnody and worship one quarter at a time. Back in January I was planning what hymns we'd sing, what readings we'd read, and what texts I would preach on until the end of April. I write a paragraph for each of the Sundays and put it on the front of the bulletin. It just so happened that the first line of today's paragraph, the one that I wrote all the way back in January, was "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."

And doesn't that feel like what we're going through? My hymnody and worship plan has certainly changed since January's planning meeting. In January who would have guessed that there would be no March Madness, no libraries, and no church. The bars are closed in Wisconsin! Who would have guessed we would have a palmless Palm Sunday, a Holy Thursday without Holy Communion, and an Easter with an empty church. Who would have guessed a pandemic would sweep the globe and kill thousands and infect hundreds of thousands? "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth."

In our Old Testament account we see the picture of a servant who is able to take abuse. "**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.**" In Isaiah 50, we see a picture of the perfect servant. A model Christian. He is a disciple who can teach God's Word. He is obedient. He is tough. He trusts in the Lord.

Yet does that describe us? Do you identify as the perfect servant? 2. (ugh!) How easily we fall apart without our plan. "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." In these past few weeks, what has been your punched in the mouth moment?

Maybe it was having one of your favorite sports cancelled. Maybe it was having a vacation or travel plans fall by the wayside. Maybe it was a major life event put on hold, cancelled, or drastically modified: a wedding, graduation, or even attending a funeral. Maybe your punched in the mouth moment was watching the news with the carnage from New York City with morgues overflowing. Have your work hours been reduced? Do you live somewhere like an assisted living facility that has outlawed visitors? Are you lonely, anxious, or depressed? Are you or a loved one sick with COVID-19?

I think for me my punched in the mouth moment was Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> when it became obvious that we were going to experience a Holy Week unlike any other. I understand why our government is doing what they're doing. However, it is sad not to be here together during Holy Week. We printed out posters for an Easter Egg hunt that didn't happen. We printed out postcards to invite people to church. It would seem all of this was for nothing.

How easily we fall apart without *our* plan. We have an idea of how things should go, and when it doesn't go accordingly, it's easy for us to be discouraged.

**“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.”** How often in this time have we been speechless? Unable to offer real words of wisdom or comfort to those who are suffering because we ourselves are weary. **“Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.”** How often in this time have we been rebellious, and scared, and fearful? **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.”** Does that describe us? Certainly not often in these times of fear and uncertainty.

Yet the Lord leaves us with a word of certainty: **“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. 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. Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?”** In the midst of this crisis, the Lord God helps you. You shall not be put to shame. The Lord God is watching over you and protecting you.

Our plans may fall apart, but we look to Jesus who is our helper, our friend, and our savior. 3. (aha!) Jesus' plan didn't fall apart when He got punched in the mouth. Of course, we need look no further than Jesus to be the perfect servant who fulfills this Old Testament text. JESUS FULFILLED ISAIAH 50.

4. (whee!) Jesus endured punishment for you. As we gather here on this Palm Sunday, it is indeed still Palm Sunday and on this day, we commemorate Jesus who enters into Jerusalem knowing that He will be persecuted, tortured, and crucified. What kind of plan includes everything unraveling? What kind of plan involves your back being struck, your beard being plucked out, and your face being spat upon?

God's plan. His plan involves His Son getting punched in the face. Our plans fall apart when disaster strikes, but God's plan can work with disaster and turn it into His glory. Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection was part of the plan from the beginning of time.

Jesus did all of this for you. He was not rebellious, He turned not backwards from His impending doom. He set His face like a flint toward Jerusalem and didn't turn away. Jesus does what He needs to do. He will endure suffering, and nothing, not COVID-19, not church being cancelled, not even death will stop Him from saving you.

It doesn't matter how full the church is. It doesn't matter where you are. Palm Sunday is still happening. Maundy Thursday isn't cancelled. Good Friday is still good. We will still celebrate Easter. We are able to do all of this because Jesus accomplished this once and for all that first Holy Week so many centuries ago. All

of these celebrations are grounded in the reality of these events, and nothing can take that away from us.

**“Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?”** The Lord God helps us, just as He helped Jesus, His Son. We can face any difficulty by the grace of God and by His strengthening.

“Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” 5. (yeah!) A punch in the mouth makes us fall back on God's plan. I know that this is going to sound weird, but thank God for punches in the mouth because it's on the floor where God finds us.

Martin Luther was once quoted as saying that his moment of spiritual awakening was in the toilet. Now, nobody is sure if Luther literally meant the toilet, or if he just meant down in the dumps. Nonetheless, down in the dumps is where God finds us.

After all, the symbol that people associate with Christianity is a cross. The cross means that we can find God in the midst of suffering, pain, and uncertainty because that's where Jesus was for you to provide you forgiveness, hope, and comfort. It is there where we receive the word to sustain us who are weary. It is there that even though we don't get all the answers, we get a God who is there for us and suffers with us. Who needs answers when you have Jesus Christ who cares for you, and who has suffered in your place?

In these times we have no choice but to rely on God, to take things one day at a time, and to know that our Savior has it under control. “Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.” It was never your plan to begin with, and God can use these moments to make us realize who is in charge.

The Lord God is still in charge. His plan is so much better than anything we could have imagined. He is God. We are not. Let God be God. He helps you. He vindicates you. He will get you through this. He will get us through this. You know the Holy Week story. Even if our path leads down the Mount of Olives, into the upper room, into a garden and onto a cross, we know what comes after. Amen!