

Sermon Summary
Maundy Thursday
24th March 2013

- Isaiah's words (50;4-9a) were originally describing the condition of Israel. The servant of God left bruised and battered by its powerful neighbours, driven into exile, and torn from its Promised Land.
- The early Christian writers will take these words and re-interpret them to describe Jesus.
- In so doing, they follow an accepted pattern of biblical interpretation; that one is able to apply the text to one's own situation and find from it meaning and direction.
- It is often claimed that the early Christians took this in a very new direction- pointing neither to a messiah like David or Moses, both substantial and powerful figures, but to a suffering Messiah.
- I am prepared to bet that in a few years' time we may well see a documentary panning the Christian faith which draws on the Gabriel revelation, just as we have seen recent documentaries on the Gospel according to Judas (late, ideologically biased and long known to scholars) or the tomb of Jesus and Mary (whose excavator refused to identify it with Jesus of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala)
- The Gabriel Revelation suggests that a group of Jewish believers in the 1st century BCE believed in a messiah who would suffer and rise again.
- Some may find this upsetting as it challenges the uniqueness of Christian claims about Jesus.
- But let's be honest, the truth of Christian claims is not based on their being unique.
- After all, other people (Judas the Galilean and Simon Bar-Kochba-to name but two) claimed to be Messiah. This does not mean that claims about Jesus must therefore fall.
- The presence of this earlier claim strikes me as deeply helpful. For it suggests that people had started to think that maybe the messiah could act in this way.
- So , when, this is what happens to Jesus, they are ready for it- and their religious and theological landscape has been prepared to accept an already possible concept (a suffering Messiah) rather than a completely radical and potentially unrecognisable development.
- All they do is to change focus: we thought it was originally about X, but now we realise this kind of prophecy was about Jesus of Nazareth.
- The *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation of the Gospel) is one worked over a long time by God- so that when his son comes and dies- he is recognisable for who he truly is- the Suffering Servant –Messiah.
- The earlier writings serve to help that penny to drop.....just as the writings of the Old Testament do

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