SCRIPTURE:
See, my servant will act wisely;
    he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.
Just as there were many who were appalled at him —
    his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
    and his form marred beyond human likeness —
so he will sprinkle many nations,
    and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see,
    and what they have not heard, they will understand.
Who has believed our message
    and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
    and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
    nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by mankind,
    a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces;
    he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
Surely he took up our pain
    and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
    stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
    he was crushed for our iniquities;
The punishment that brought us peace was on him,
    and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
    each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
    the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and afflicted,
    yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
    and as a sheep before its shearsers is silent,
    so he did not open his mouth;
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
    Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
    for the transgression of my people he was punished.
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
    and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life until death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 52:13–53:12, NIV)

MEDITATION:

If there’s one thing we quickly learn in issues of both science and faith, it's this: there's more to reality than meets the eye! Those who have been around a while have learned this lesson many times over. Situations are almost always more complicated than we first imagined. Hidden factors are often involved that we never thought about. It's also true that there's more to the death of Jesus Christ than meets the eye. All kinds of things are going on behind the scenes. Jesus's disciples didn’t know what was going on when their Master was taken to the cross. They deserted him. Only later, by the Holy Spirit's enabling, did they begin to make sense of these things.

Our text begins, "See my servant..." (Isa. 52:13). Other translations say, "Behold my servant..." It's important to remember that it is God himself who is speaking here. He wants us to have a good look, a good close look, at his servant, Jesus. If we are to understand what salvation is all about, Isaiah has critical information that God wants us to know: "Behold, my servant..." Through Isaiah, God tells us that his servant will "act wisely" (Isa. 52:13, NIV). Because his servant Jesus acts in such a wise manner, God exalts him to the highest place. It has been said that "wisdom" is knowledge put to use in the most helpful way. Jesus knew what needed to be done to deal with humankind's broken relationship with God. God's servant, in his wisdom, will cleanse the nations (Isa. 52:15)—he will remove that which is unclean.

In his wisdom, God's servant will stand far above all this world's rulers in importance. They come and go. But he will remain forever. Isaiah tells us that God's servant will appear as a tender shoot (Isa. 53:2) on the old tree that Israel's faith had become. God's servant will be a tender root emerging from dry ground. God's servant will make possible a new beginning for Israel—and not just for Israel but for the whole world. God's servant acted wisely and God exalted him to his right hand. God's servant didn't die without offspring. Over the years, multitudes have joined his family of believers, through their God-given and God-inspired faith. God's servant has done, and continues to do, God's will in this world. Good Friday is all about Jesus's death. But Jesus's death is definitely not the end of the story.

REFLECTION:

These words from Isaiah are the clearest expression of God's good news in all of the Old Testament. Faith in Jesus brings us peace with God. Faith in Jesus brings us an abundant life. Isaiah 53:11 NIV says, "After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life, and be satisfied." Jesus was satisfied in knowing that he had completed God's plan of salvation. He had paid the price for sin. He had made forgiveness possible. He opened the doors to heaven and to eternal life. Jesus has every reason to be satisfied. "It is finished," he said. Your sin debt and mine has been paid in full! Because of his death on the cross for our sins, forgiveness is available to all who will reach out the hand of faith and receive it. God's servant would make it possible for our broken relationship to be restored.

True peace doesn't come from weapons of war. It comes from a heart reconciled to God. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). God's word brings hope to our hearts. God's law tells us the bad news about our sins and the Gospel declares the good news about Jesus's forgiveness, earned for us at the cross of Good Friday. So it is true. There's much more to reality than meets the eye! There's more to Good Friday than just a man on a cross. Good Friday is all about God and his love for the world—expressed so clearly through the sacrificial death of his son. May God impress that truth on our hearts, today and every day.
PRAYER:
Dear Heavenly Father, enable us to see the wisdom of the cross. Enable us to see past the obvious to the underlying meaning of these events. We thank you for the truth you have revealed to us in your Word. We thank you for the one who is the way, and the truth, and the life. We pray in his name. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How important is Good Friday in terms of the totality of Christian proclamation?
2. Some Christians attend worship services on Palm Sunday and then again on Easter with no services in between. Other Christians have services on Maundy Thursday as well as Good Friday leading up, in sequence, to Easter Sunday. Do you see any value to these extra services?
3. If you were to ask a non-Christian what Good Friday is all about, what do you think they might say?
4. In some places in the scriptures, the Messiah is described, as we see in this devotion, as the Suffering Servant. Other scriptures portray him as the Conquering King. How can these two very different images be reconciled?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Ordained in 1982, Terry Defoe has served congregations in the Western Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. He has served as a chaplain at the University of British Columbia as well as Simon Fraser University. In 2018, he published Evolving Certainties: Resolving Conflict at the Intersection of Faith and Science, endorsed by scientists affiliated with the ASA as well as with BioLogos. His primary focus in his retirement is reassuring evangelicals that mainstream science and a traditional Christian faith can coexist in a mutually beneficial way and that Christian young people need not give up their faith in order to embrace a vocation in science.