



### Lenten Reflection for Wednesday, April 13th

Janet Kaplan

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

#### Isaiah 50:4 - 9a

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like 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 are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.*

In my twenty-something years as a professor of poetry writing, I've often had to sustain my sometimes-weary, hyper-anxious students with a word—or words: "I get you." "I have your back." I've been a decent teacher but, unlike Isaiah, I've been a terrible student. If I'd been graded on opening my ears to God or offering myself without fear or shame to those who might harm me (or who were simply unwilling to be comforted by the likes of me)—if these were gradable subjects—I'd have racked up F after F and finally withdrawn from my studies to pursue something less onerous like, say, poetry-writing. I've concluded that opening fully to God isn't for the faint of heart: someone or something is sure to be struck.

Just now I'm eyeing the hawk that's perched on the bare-branched ailanthus across from my window. I've seen this young hawk before; the hawk is waiting for a pigeon or sparrow, inexperienced or injured, to make the mistake of pecking at the bird feeder or drinking at the water bowl. I know that by placing the feeder and bowl on the fire escape, I've summoned the hawk; but

the small birds are good at hiding. Even frail, their senses are heightened to the hawk's statue-still presence and branch-colored camouflage. No matter how hungry or thirsty, they won't come to the fire escape to accept their gifts of food until the hawk has flown off.

Have I grown so good at hiding, so comfortable in my safe dark crevice, that I'd rather not risk opening to God or asking God for anything? Together with you at our beloved Holy Apostles Church, I have sung, "Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?"

Late one night as he paced back and forth, unable to sleep, Isaiah heard God ask, "Whom shall I send?" "Here I am!" he cried, giving the answer that echoed God's name just as all the fully awakened seekers in the Bible did when the great I AM called them. "Fine," said God. "If you're here, you'd better be ready to be spat at, beaten, or worse. If you're not, well, fuhgeddaboutit" (or something like that).

I want God's gifts: my daily gluten-free bread; hearing a familiar passage from scripture suddenly become so alive that I'm wreathed in spiritual understanding and healing; inexplicably losing my fear enough to talk with and offer food to people on the subway whom I might not have wanted to see as people, as members of Christ's body. These are God's gifts. Without them I return to fear as if it were my given name.

But if one day I were to open fully to God, I have no doubt that this false self named Fear would be utterly destroyed, a useless moth-eaten garment.

And then who would I be?



Janet Kaplan lives in Windsor Terrace with her life partner Ethan Sirotko and their too-beautiful-for-words rescue cats, Shayna and Issy. She feels truly blessed to be a member of the Holy Apostles community.