

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Palm Sunday - Year A
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Third Sunday of Quarantine Worship
Matthew 21:1-11
Isaiah 50:4-9a
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 27:11-54
04/05/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

11Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." 12But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. 13Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. 15Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. 19While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." 20Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." 22Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" 23Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" 24So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. 27Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. 32As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42" He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.' " 44The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. 45From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50Then

Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"
The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Cross

Good morning... "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!*" These words, from verse 46, are what's on my mind right now. They make me wonder a great many things, at the forefront of which is this question: how many have in the past three months uttered those same words... As of last night, 64,753 people have died from COVID-19 in the world. That's 8,489 deaths in the United States of America. In Virginia we have had 52 deaths, 16 of which were on the eastern side of the state. "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!*"

On the average Palm Sunday I try and preach and focus on the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, but this year, the cross was at the center of my thoughts. The two stories, the entry into the Holy City with palms lying on the ground, and the public execution stand in stark contrast. The Gospel certainly changes. Which is a weird thing to call it anyway. Gospel means "good news" in Greek, so where is the good news in the trial, beating, and execution of Jesus? One commentator writes that "*Christian conviction insists that the death of Jesus is integral to God's good news in Christ Jesus.*" And that claim holds true throughout the history of the church. This death means something that cannot be overlooked. Here at the end of Lent, we want to run toward Easter, but as my pastor growing up would say, "*you can't get to Easter without going through the cross.*"

In order to get at the cross, to understand it, if that's possible, we need to look (as Veronice Miles suggests) at the whole of the Gospel of Matthew. The cross doesn't happen in a vacuum, and so the events of Jesus' ministry give us clues about his death. Miles writes "*Matthew will not permit us to engage [the crucifixion] as an isolated event, but reveals an unequivocal connection between Jesus' crucifixion and his overall life and ministry, especially those events preceding his arrest. In other words, this narrative invites us to engage in the practice of remembering, to hear Jesus' anguished cry from the cross in dialogue with the gospel he proclaimed, so that we might discern the efficacy of the crucifixion for our lives and permit it to create us anew.*"

Jesus dies because those in power killed him. He died because the crowd let it happen, even encouraged it. He died because he lived a life that was so radical that it threatened the very foundation of the world, and silencing him was the only option.

But he doesn't stay silent does he? His final words hint at something bigger. When Jesus utters "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He is quoting Psalm 22. There are 150 Psalms, and scholars have broken them up into a variety of different categories, but the group that's important for us today are laments. A lament is a deep and powerful expression of grief or sadness. We see lament Psalms when Israel shouts out to God, trying to understand what's happening. But here's the interesting thing, laments in scripture vent their frustration, they yell out to God, they get everything off their chest, but they always end by vowing their trust in God.

So Jesus' cry of anguish hints at something more, just as this story in scripture does, time and time again. Once again, listen to the words of Veronica Miles: *“In today's Lenten narrative, those who orchestrated Jesus' death were so preoccupied with power and fearful of change that they missed the possibility of a world in which love and compassion could become a reality. As a result, they and their followers crucified God's Son, mocking and deriding him, lest they believe and be changed. Their actions are both distressing and instructive, affording us an opportunity to reflect upon the mistakes of the past and avoid repeating them in the present. In response, we must remain vigilant in the work of the ministry, engaging in praxes that embody the love of God, self, and neighbor as a testament to the crucified One.”*

So, while that's all nice and interesting, we still haven't answered the question of what it all means and where in the world is the good news in all of this?! Well, I doubt that I'll ever understand everything the cross can teach us, so I don't think one sermon can ever capture what God is fully up to, but think about this: Maybe the good news is that our God isn't some stoic being that doesn't understand our pain. God wanted change for us so bad that God became a human being! Taking on the flesh, devoting God's whole human life to teaching and correcting the pain and suffering of the world. And that same God experienced the same pain we feel, even more so, being beaten and tortured and sentenced to death alone on a cross. Our God KNOWS that pain! And what's more, God didn't let that pain or suffering win! God did everything in God's power to make sure that evil doesn't get the last word. But I'm getting ahead of myself, that's a story for another day... amen.