

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Palm Sunday - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Luke 19:28-40

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 23:1-49

04/10/2022

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke:

1Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.  
2They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." 3Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." 4Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man."  
5But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."  
6When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. 9He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.  
10The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.  
11Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate.

12That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. 13Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, 14and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. 15Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16I will therefore have him flogged and release him.” 18Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” 19(This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) 20Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; 21but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” 22A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” 23But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. 24So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. 25He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. 26As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. 28But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ 30Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to

the hills, 'Cover us.' 31For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" 32Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34[Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." ] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." 39One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." 44It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. 47When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." 48And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. 49But all his

acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

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

Amen.

### **Palms and A Passion**

Good morning! Some of you know this already, but in college I was a leader with YoungLife. The goal of this ministry was to share the Gospel message with high school students who had never had a chance to hear it. The focus experience revolved around something called “Club” where funny skits and songs were played and the day finished with a short Gospel lesson and Talk. These Talks were usually focused on a few main themes, who God was, our need for God, and the reality of sin in our lives. They always ended the season with sin, cross, and resurrection Talks. They boiled down the essential Christian stories to share them with others.

Does that sound familiar? We do the same thing with our church seasons. The lectionary follows a similar pattern, beginning with a new church year every Advent, telling the story of God’s work and preparation before the birth of Jesus on Christmas. With the Baptism of Our Lord we move into the earthly ministry of Jesus. Then on Ash Wednesday we begin Lent, a time, I have argued, which does exactly what YoungLife Club did, share the essential message and ministry of Jesus Christ as he heads towards Jerusalem. Easter tells the story of the results, but no spoilers, we’re not there yet!

But if the main seasons of the church tell its central stories, Holy Week turns it up to eleven, offering what is essentially a crash course in

Christianity. As luck would have it, Holy Week begins now, with Palm Sunday, also called Passion Sunday. So, I offer an invitation to experience this most special time like the uncountable number of people before you, who throughout time have found meaning in these next seven days.

I started attending YoungLife in high school, but I had grown up in the church, the story was known to me, just as I'm sure it's known to you. But when I got to YoungLife camp I saw something incredible—while I had heard the message before, so many were experiencing it for the first time! Sure, they knew Jesus was supposedly God, and Christianity was understood on a pop-culture level, but it truly was the first time they had heard these stories for themselves. So, if you can, try coming to the texts this week in the same way, with fresh eyes wondering what might happen next.

For many of us, today is Palm Sunday, but in recent years we have seen a push for what is called “Passion Sunday” where both the entry into Jerusalem and Jesus' death are proclaimed. As I discussed with the pericope study on Monday, I used to be firmly in the Palm Sunday camp, but then I realized that without the passion narrative being read today, it's possible for a Christian who usually misses Good Friday to go their entire life and never hear scripture and sermon about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. And because we hear the crucifixion story from only the Gospel of John every Good Friday, this allows us to experience the story of the cross from our other Gospels. So today we will walk a line between both of our assigned texts, seeing what they can tell us together.

William G. Carter writes that *“for all its joyful hosannas, Palm Sunday is a day of contrasts. We hear it in the hymns, pivoting as they do between happy triumph and inevitable crucifixion. We see it in Jesus, as*

*the ruler of the universe chooses to ride a borrowed colt. The contrast is clear, in the destination, as the city that welcomes him will later scream for his blood.”<sup>1</sup> It’s hard to believe that the crowd can welcome him so excitedly into the city and still, so soon turn against him. But again, Carter points out the truth. “Yet there is something about him that people resist and wish to eliminate. We cannot single out empire or Sanhedrin for blame. There has been something about Jesus that people have resisted from the very beginning. In Nazareth, he preached to his hometown crowd that God loves the outsider, and his neighbors tried to hurl him over a cliff. As he taught on the Sabbath in Capernaum, someone with a filthy spirit yelled out, ‘Jesus, leave us alone!’ Luke says every time Jesus healed anybody, he had to muzzle the evil forces because they were trying to compromise his mission. From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus faced opposition to his words and deeds, not because he did something wrong, but because he came in the power of God’s Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>*

On an average Sunday our Gospel message is around 350ish words, and it can be a challenge to find our focus. But today we’re dealing with over 1,100 words, so narrowing down with so much is overwhelming, but I want us to focus on one thing today, expectation. What are the expectations of the crowds and others present in our story, and what are our own?

Because Israel had been expecting a savior for a long time. Rome was just the newest captor in a long series of suffering for God’s people. The Messiah was going to change this. But the problem comes when what they expected the Messiah to do clashes with what Jesus does. He performs all the traditional signs, he has all the credentials. His birth and lineage, his

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<sup>1</sup> Bartlett, David L., and Barbara B. Taylor. *Feasting on the Word. Year C, Volume 2*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 180.

baptism and transfiguration. Even his entry into the Holy City fulfills prophecy. Carter writes that “*we hear the story of Jesus approaching Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, from the spot where tradition held that the Messiah would appear.*”<sup>3</sup> In the other Gospels we read from Zechariah which proclaims that the Messiah will come riding into the city on a colt. All the pieces are there, but something seems different.

And because of those differences, because they expect Jesus to be one thing, they kill him when he fails to meet said expectations. All are equally at blame. The crowds and followers expect him to overthrow Rome in military or political might. The Roman soldiers and leaders fear the same thing. Others hope the Messiah will take over the Temple and begin a new era from that holy hill. The religious leaders, the priests and scribes, fear that exact shift of power. Pharisees who followed strict rules expect the Messiah to be even more strict than they are. And Jesus lets down all these expectations, because God is doing something different. Where the crowd only sees what they want to see, Jesus has spent the last year doing ministry that challenged the world to see God’s work in a different way. And here is the kicker, every single one of us is in danger of doing the exact same thing. We have heard the story, we think we know the ending, and so we zone out, looking for details that confirm what we already think.

Remember that YoungLife camp I told you about? Something incredible would happen. Towards the end of the week we came to the same story we just read. But, unlike most of us who have heard the story time and time again, most of those attending camp were truly hearing it for the first time. That’s what I want for us this week. To approach this story with fresh eyes. Because at my first year of camp I watched as friends saw the ministry

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 152.

and compassion of Jesus for the first time, and then the horror and pain when he went willingly to his death. I saw the disbelief and shock in their faces. Disbelief and shock that would have been mirrored in everyone present 2,000 years ago too. It did something to my friends, and by witnessing it, it changed me too. Because, after all, that's what God has been trying to do this whole time. Amen.