

April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday, Year C

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Psalms 31: 9-16

Luke 23: 1-49

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The assembly of the elders of the people rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They 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." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When 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. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even 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. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and 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. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken

place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A 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." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He 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.

As 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. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For 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.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When 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. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And 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!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And now we have finally reached Holy Week. This day holds so much, going from the joy of the palms and the hosannas, to the trial, passion and death of Jesus. All in just a few days, days that we begin to remember and walk today.

It is really too much to take in in one service, too much and too varied the emotions and events.

I remember so many Palm Sundays when I was in school ministry. Palm Sunday celebrated with 400 boys in the gymnasium. We only covered the arrival of Jesus to Jerusalem at this service. We began with bells rung out by the bell choir as they processed in, followed by 40 kindergarteners, all given palms to carry, only at the very last minute as they stepped out into the wide aisle. Palms handed to 5-year-old boys with time to wait, always resulted in sword fights with the palms as weapons.

So the teachers and I would hand the palms out just as the boys stepped into the aisle, a bit dazzled to see the other boys stretching the whole length of the gym. (As only a kindergarten boy can do, as they usually sat up front, they had never noticed all the many rows of older boys sitting behind them!) The boys enthusiastically waved their palms and called a few hosannas, and trotted down the aisle, filled with a bit of the magic and hope likely felt by the children of Jerusalem welcoming Jesus so many eons ago.

So much hope thrust upon, wrapped up in one man, a gentle smiling man riding a young donkey, a man already carrying a price on his head, riding into the most powerful of cities.

All of those there that day, children running alongside him, adults laying

their shawls on the ground ahead of him, and all of us here today in 2022, all of us with a different image of the one to whom we shout: Hosanna! The one to whom we shout, Save us now!

Who can save us? A question relevant in the year 33, and in the year 2022.

Who can save us?

One with a mighty sword?? One who is shrewd? One who is wise?

Who can save us?

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

The prince of peace, who comes only with love, only and overwhelmingly, with love.

For me, this is all I can take in today; I can only walk into Jerusalem, following the donkey, carrying our Savior.

I cannot, today, take in the Last Supper, the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

If it feels like too much to you too, I invite you to join me this week for our Maundy Thursday service, to remember and contemplate the Last Supper. This is my favorite service of the church year: a remembrance drenched in the love and mercy of our God.

And I invite you to join me for our Good Friday service for time to meditate, to join the women at the foot of the cross.

When I was in school ministry, we took it one day at a time in Holy Week, since, after all, we were already there, in school, and Chapel was part of each day.

But know, I understand so well how fast and full our days are as grown-ups, and how hard it is to break into our schedules, to interrupt our days and come to church, to step away from the maddening crowd and slip into the quiet.

But before we run to the joy of Easter, consider grasping for a few moments to taste and see at the table, and to come survey the wondrous cross.

Amen

