

Palm/Passion Sunday

April 2, 2023/17



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

The only reason they (Christians) must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's word, enduring this for the sake of Christ. No people on earth have to endure such bitter hate. No one has compassion on them; they are given myrrh and gall to drink when they thirst. And all of this is done... because they want to have none but Christ and no other God.

—Martin Luther—

Church & Ministry III, LW 41

John 12:12-19

As the crowds that had gathered heard that Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. Unlike in the other gospels (Mark 11:1-11, Matthew 21:1-11, Luke 19:28-44), Jesus finds the donkey that he rides into town on, hearing the excited cheers of those who saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, as well as others who knew of his works. This was the day that traditionally the Passover lamb was chosen and set aside for the Passover feast. As the Pharisees remarked at Jesus' growing popularity they said, "Look, the whole world (cosmos) has gone after him." The true Passover Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, was being set apart.

- In what ways have you come to understand Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" which we sing during the liturgy of Holy Communion?
- What do you think was the deciding factor for the religious leaders to go ahead with their plot to kill Jesus? Was it simply the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back?

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The servant of God recounted his suffering but also his vindication by God. Though he was not rebellious he was still struck down, insulted, spat upon and disgraced. In spite of this suffering, the servant trusted that the one who would save him was near. No one could declare him guilty when the Lord God helps him.

- In what ways does the Lord aid the suffering and shamed?
- In what ways can we identify Jesus with this suffering servant?

Philippians 2:5-11

This text from Philippians is what is called the "Kenosis Hymn" after the Greek word *κενωω* (*keno'o*, pronounced ken-ah-oh) which means to make empty. Jesus Christ emptied himself of his power and divinity taking on our human form — the form of a slave — in all of our weakness and vulnerability. His humbleness and humility was exemplified by his obedience to God unto death. And not just any death, but a murderous, traitorous, violent death on the Roman torture instrument of the cross. The paradox of all of this is that, through his death, he is highly exalted and his name is above all names.

- Why is it so hard to understand that the suffering and shame that Christ endured has resulted in our freedom and eternal

life? Do we deserve such divine favor? Why or why not?

- What do you suppose St. Paul meant when he said regarding Jesus' name, "every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth"?

Matthew 26: 1-27:66

The crucifixion narrative, when read in its entirety, has tremendous power. It can be almost overpowering to the hearer. The excruciating detail, the knowledge of where the road is going, the injustice, the suffering and betrayal, all describe the entire chain of events that led to Jesus' death. It can leave the listener bereft. One of the challenges of Holy Week is to faithfully preach Christ crucified, understanding that the Crucified Christ is the Risen Christ.

As the chief priests and the elders of the religious community gathered at the home of the high priest, they vowed to kill Jesus, but they wanted to wait until the festival had concluded. They didn't want to make a scene while there were so many visitors in Jerusalem.

- Why do you suppose they were so careful to wait until the Passover Festival was over before they arrested Jesus? What were they afraid of?

Matthew wrote that once Judas was promised a reward for betraying Jesus he "began looking for an opportune time." Judas was on a mission and he was planning his strategy as to how and where he would turn Jesus over to authorities and collect his blood money. Jesus was also on a mission and, for him, timing was very important as well.

- How do you see Jesus' perfect timing in all the stories you know about his mercy and miracles? In the cross and resurrection? In your own life?

Despite his certainty that he will remain faithful to the end, Peter proved unable to stand firm in the midst of the darkness that surrounded Jesus on the road to the cross.

- How can our pride become an obstacle to faith? Was Peter's denial the result of a character flaw, or is there more to it?

While the disciples slept, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane that, if possible, this cup might pass from him. While there has been much discussion about whether Jesus was wavering from his mission, his final prayer is that the Father's will be done.

- Do you think Jesus' prayer is a sign of doubt or a sign of faith?
- In our lives, why is it so important to know that we can bring all our secret cares and concerns to our Father?