

St. Paul's Anglican Church
Palm Sunday; Matt 27:1 to 54
April 14, 2019

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Today is Palm Sunday; the day we traditionally distribute lengths and crosses of palm in remembrance of that day when Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Last weekend was a time for great rejoicing as Bishop Grundorf ordained Fr. Dennis to the Office of Deacon, and confirmed Brenda Jones, Ken Sabel, and Mike and Heather Davis.

But this rejoicing 2000 years ago, was much greater! Jesus received a king's welcome as palm branches and clothing were laid in his path. The masses proclaimed Him to be the Great Prophet of which Moses spoke; the One who would be a mediator between God and man, who would reveal God's purpose, who would be full of love and compassion, and who would reflect God's glory. He would be the new leader of the people.

They shouted **Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.** They called Him their Savior; they acknowledged Him as the Lord's anointed, and declared his kingship.

If today calls to remembrance such a glorious occasion, why is the gospel reading (Matt 27:1-54) chosen for today a recount of his betrayal by one of his closest disciples, Judas Iscariot; his arrest and trial before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; his atrocious beating and irreverent mocking; and his barbaric death nailed to a cross?

Perhaps the greatest contrast between Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the unconscionable events outlined in the gospel, is that the multitude that had just welcomed Him as their king, now shouted for the release of a notorious criminal named Barabbas. It is reported Barabbas was guilty of insurrection

against Rome and had committed murder, but the crowd shouted, “release Barabbas,” but “crucify Jesus Christ!”

Consider this irony. Barabbas was guilty but was set free; Jesus is innocent but was condemned to death. How can this be possible? Why should the Son of God, or as the bishop said last week, God the Son, suffer a violent death on the cross?

This is what St. Paul said about it in our epistle reading (Phil. 2: 5-11): Jesus, **being in the form of God** (He is God), **thought it not robbery to be equal with God** (his divine nature is the same as the Father’s); **but made himself of no reputation**, (He turned his back on his own divinity), **and took upon him the form of a servant**, (He took our humanity upon Himself in order to achieve the will of God the Father). That is why Paul said **he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross**. Jesus had to die in obedience to the Father because that is the redeeming part of God’s salvation plan; that is how the price of our sins was paid.

Paul addresses what Jesus did, but the Old Testament reading (Isa. 52:13-53:12) goes deeper into why He had to suffer. It is one of four passages from Isaiah that are called Servant Songs because they prophesy about the servant aspect of our Savior. Our reading is known as the Suffering Servant because of its prophecies of our Lord’s suffering; many of these verses are read during our “Stations of the Cross” services.

Here are three prophecies from our reading that are fulfilled in the gospel. Isaiah said, **He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief**. Matthew reported after they placed a crown of thorns on his head, **they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!** The Savior of the world was despised and rejected; He was considered an outcast by those He came to save.

Isaiah stated **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter**. Matthew reads, **after they had mocked him, they led him away to crucify him**. Throughout his affliction and suffering

He had to remain silent; if He successfully defended Himself, He would have been released, and God's salvation plan would be in jeopardy. He silently, obediently and willingly went to the cross.

Isaiah said **he was numbered with the transgressors**; the Savior had to be counted among the criminals. Matthew said, **There were two thieves crucified with him**; as innocent as He is, Jesus was treated as though He was guilty of all charges.

Knowing that our Savior's suffering was prophesied in Old Testament Scripture helps us understand God's salvation plan. And, the last phrase in Isaiah's reading ties everything together and gives us the awesome benefit all believers receive as a result of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. **He bared the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Have you heard the saying, "To err is human; to blame it on someone else shows management potential?" Jesus is the King of Creation; He is on the top of the management food chain. But He did not place the blame for all the sins ever committed on someone else, not even on Satan; He placed our blame on his own shoulders.

All of mankind's sins were strapped to the back of our Savior, and through his death, and his resurrection, He is able to intercede with God the Father on our behalf. In other words, Barabbas was released in Jesus' place, but Jesus died in Barabbas place, and in our place.

After witnessing the earthquake and other unexplained events of the day, the gravity of our Lord's sacrifice was even felt in the heart of the Roman Centurion who over saw the crucifixion. He was not a disciple of Jesus, and probably had little faith in God, but in his *fear*, he confessed, **truly this was the Son of God.**

Christians see these events from a vastly different perspective. We would not say, in our *fear*, truly this was the Son of God, but in our *faith*, we would boldly proclaim, truly this is the Son of God. He always was, He is now, and He will forever be the Son of God, and our Savior.

So, while the name Palm Sunday reminds us of the rejoicing at our Savior's reception into Jerusalem as an *earthly king*, our

gospel reading reminds us of the great sacrifice Jesus made for us, and points toward our services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and the Easter Vigil.

Consequently, on Easter morning, through God's grace, our Lord's sacrifice and our faith, we can rejoice in the knowledge of the resurrection of our *heavenly King*. We can rejoice because through his crucifixion on Good Friday, our confessed sins are removed from us. And through his Resurrection on Easter and his later Ascension back to heaven, He has opened wide the gates of heaven to all who believe in Him.

So, when we gather here this Easter morning, we can triumphantly echo St. Paul's directive by boldly proclaiming **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, because only He could **bare the sin of many, and make intercession for us**. Only Jesus Christ can bare our sins and intercede on our behalf. Only our Savior can lead us to eternal life.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all might, majesty, power, dominion, and glory, both now and evermore. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.