

Gospel and Sermon Transcript - April 13, 2025

Welcome to worship on this Palm Sunday.

It is also the Sunday of the Passion.

And those two things are very difficult to pry apart and probably shouldn't be.

And as a result, our worship service takes us from that joyful parade into Jerusalem

to a parade that was much more macabre, and that was Jesus being led to Golgotha.

We get all of that in a day.

And maybe that's significant.

I mean, if you've looked at headlines for the paper this morning

and heard about a hospital in Gaza City being bombed,

it is one that was affiliated with the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

And that bombing affects many people.

We can only give thanks that more people were not killed in the bombing.

One person died in the evacuation, but everyone who evacuated was spared.

There's also intensified fighting in Ukraine today.

Maybe we think that coming to church allows us a place to hide from the world.

And I don't think it does.

But instead, this is a place where we come together to lean on each other on our faith

and upon God's goodness to strengthen us for the days that are before us.

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 23rd chapter.

Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.

We 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 Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

And Jesus 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 had learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at the 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 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 one another.

Before this, they had been enemies.

[no audio]

[music]

[no audio]

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 flawed and release him."

Then they all shouted together, "Away with this fellow, release Barabbas for us."

Barabbas 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 him, 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 flawed and then release him."

But they kept urgently demanding with loud shudders 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.

Barabbas. And he handed Jesus over as they wished.

[Music]

As the soldiers led Jesus 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 people followed him, and among them were women
beating their breasts and wailing for Jesus.

But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me.
Weep for yourselves and your children, for the days are surely coming
when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wolves 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 Jesus
when they came to the place called the Skull.

They crucified Jesus there with criminals, one on his right, one on his left.

When Jesus was crucified, he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know
what they're doing."

And the soldiers cast lots to divide Jesus' clothing, and the people stood by
watching.

But the leaders scoffed, saying, "Well, 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 hanged there kept deriding Jesus, saying,

"Are you not the Messiah? Save yourselves, and us."

But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God,

since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?

And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds.

But this man, this man has done nothing wrong."

And then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

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Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

It was now about noon.

Darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon,

and while the sun's light failed, 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 Jesus' acquaintances, including the women who followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Won't you be seated?

Sermon

Grace and peace to you.

From the one who was, who is, and who is to come.

Of the four Gospels, Luke does a lot with music.

There are songs that he introduces and reintroduces even in this pilgrimage from near Galilee to Jerusalem itself.

As we began our procession today, the people sang,

"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory to the highest heaven."

You might remember those words, words that are part of the Christmas story,

when the angels sang, "Glory to God and the highest in peace to God's people on earth."

This is what people hoped and dreamed as they processed into Jerusalem.

They understood what they get.

As Lent carries us to Good Friday, we might be tempted to say no.

That the empire wins and that some odd collusion between some religious leaders and the empire seals Jesus' fate.

But that's not even the whole story.

Unfortunately, the Christian story is riddled with times when we have scapegoated other people, blaming other people for Jesus' death.

It's almost as if we put ourselves in Pilate's chair,

or we put ourselves in the crowd's chair thinking that we get to judge, but we don't.

As it turns out, we are all in some ways complicit in what happens in the world today.

Some of us may be bold enough to march in protest.

Some of us may choose to be bold in other ways that are less visible.

And in a world like this one, it seems that maybe boldness takes the form of just basic kindness and decency in a world that seems to have forgotten about that.

So maybe that's where we find ourselves as we make this pilgrimage into Jerusalem.

Earlier this week I told a story about a parade that takes place in Columbus, Ohio.

It's called the Duda Parade.

Its point is that it doesn't have a point.

It's just people get together on High Street, which is a university and really the party section of Columbus, if there is one, but there is, and that's it.

Where people would put together off-the-wall floats, absurd slogans, and just traipse through the streets and laugh and have a good time and poke fun at everything.

In some ways, that's what the march to Jerusalem was.

It was like a Duda Parade sort of lampooning the empire.

I love the image given to us by John Dominic Crossin and Marcus Borg and one of the last books that they wrote together.

They said, "Imagine two parades that day, the one from the east, this ragtag, improv, palm-fistuned procession.

And coming from the west, the empire with war horses, soldiers, shields, and weaponry."

And they meet in Jerusalem.

And they collide in Jerusalem.

And that improv procession does not go unnoticed.

That becomes part of the collision.

The question that I'd like to pose as we go into Holy Week,

who lampoons home?

Who launches parody of home?

Is it possible, in fact,

that the empire is actually just a ghastly, ugly, sick, and twisted parody of God's vision,

of shalom, of governance, or as we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven."

What songs do we sing?

Amen.