

Gospel and Sermon Transcript -Palm Sunday - March 29, 2026

00:02

[Music]

00:22

I just made that up.

00:40

[MUSIC PLAYING]

00:46

On this Palm Sunday, we do begin with a procession.

00:50

I'd like to start by talking about the idea of such a procession.

00:56

And that will lead us into the parade route.

00:59

And I'm looking, you have everything you need, I think.

01:03

You've got palms and you've got the insert.

01:05

You won't need to worry about a hemminal at this stage.

01:08

So hopefully that will make the procession easier.

01:13

Two words about a procession like this.

01:17

intentional and improvised.

01:20

When Jesus comes into Jerusalem with his entourage,

01:24

there's much intentionality about what he's doing and why,

01:28

which is really to defy the empire.

01:33

It's subversive.

01:35

It's also improvised.

01:36

You notice people bring in what they have.

01:39

They chop down what's available, which in their case,

01:42

were the palm fronds to make the rout.

01:45

This too is a bit of shade against the empire

01:48

where everything was carefully choreographed

01:51

to the last detail and designed to intimidate.

01:55

So even in repeating this act,

01:59

in a way we are affirming what Jesus was about,

02:03

which was not about the empire,

02:05

but about things like feeding the poor,

02:10

tending the sick, welcoming the stranger.

02:13

So that's what we are holding in our hearts and minds today.

02:19

The route, you might enjoy this.

02:27

(gentle music)

02:40

The Passion Gospel according to St. Matthew,

02:43

the 27th chapter. Glory to you, O Lord. Now Jesus stood before the governor and

02:51

the governor asked him, "Are you the king and the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But

02:59

when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he did not answer. Then

03:05

Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"

03:11

But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

03:20

Now at the festival, the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.

03:28

At that time, they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas.

03:34

So after they had gathered Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you?"

03:41

Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who was called the Messiah?" For Pilate realized that it

03:47

was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus the Messiah over. While he was

03:54

sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with

04:00

that innocent man. For today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream

04:05

about him. Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for

04:12

Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the

04:18

two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to

04:25

them, then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah? All of them

04:30

said, "Let him be crucified." Then he asked, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they

04:37

shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified." So when Pilate saw that he could

04:46

do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and he

04:52

washed his hands before the crowd saying, "I'm innocent of this man's blood. See to

04:57

it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be honest and on our

05:02

children." So he released for Abba's for them and after flogging Jesus he handed

05:10

him over to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into

05:15

the governor's headquarters and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

05:20

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown,

05:29

they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him,

05:36

saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. After

05:50

and they led him away to crucify him.

05:56

- As they went out, they came upon a man

06:00

from Cyrene named Simon, and they compelled the man

06:03

to carry Jesus' cross.

06:05

And when they came to a place called Golgotha,

06:08

which means place of the skull,

06:10

they offered him wine to drink mixed with gall,

06:14

but when he tasted it, he did not drink it.

06:18

And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among themselves by casting lots.

06:24

Then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

06:28

And over his head they put a charge against him which read, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews."

06:37

Then two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

06:44

Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads, and saying,

06:48

"You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,

06:53

save yourself.

06:55

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

06:59

In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders,

07:04

were mocking him, saying, "He saved others.

07:07

He cannot save himself.

07:10

He is the King of Israel.

07:12

let him come down from the cross now and we will believe in him. He trusts in God.

07:18

Let God deliver him now if he wants to for he said I am God's son. The rebels

07:26

who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

07:34

From noon on darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon

07:40

and about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elle, Elle, lem esalachtaneh,"

07:48

which is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders

07:56

heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and

08:02

got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to Jesus

08:08

to drink. But the other said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come and save him."

08:16

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and he breathed his last. At that moment, the

08:24

curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and rocks were

08:31

split. The tombs were also opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep

08:37

were raised after his resurrection, they came out of the tombs and entered the

08:44

holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him who

08:50

were keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and what took place, they were

08:57

terrified and they said truly this man was God's son. The gospel of our Lord.

09:06

to praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

09:12

I find myself this year encountering

09:16

this part of the passion almost like a thread or a string,

09:23

part of a tapestry.

09:25

But there are loose ends.

09:28

I'd like to take one and let it pass over other points

09:33

on the thread.

09:33

but working backward from the soldier's conclusion

09:39

to the march into Jerusalem.

09:43

And as I do, the moments that I want to pass over

09:45

are those ones where we are confronted with this question.

09:52

Who is the imposter here?

09:56

What is legitimate?

09:59

And what is just parody?

10:31

In effect, when people would bend the knee to Caesar, they would say, "Caesar, Caesar is Lord."

10:42

Yet here we are with these agents of execution.

10:49

People who are insiders in the Empire say, "Truly, truly, this was God's son."

11:02

Let's take that moment now and let it pass over a couple of other moments.

11:09

Huh, he saved others, did he? Let's see him save himself if he's really who he says he is.

11:19

Or there's that moment when there's a choice between which prisoner is going to be released,

11:27

Barabbas or Jesus.

11:32

Some of you might remember what the name Barabbas means, son of the father.

11:41

Again, who is the son of the Father, the Notorious Criminal?

11:48

Or this Jesus of Nazareth?

11:50

This Jesus the One, hail this Messiah?

11:59

And now I'd like to take a moment from the very beginning of Matthew's Gospel to kind

12:03

of folding over into the middle of this story.

12:12

You might remember that Matthew's gospel

12:14

begins with a very elaborate genealogy of who Jesus is.

12:19

He is the descendant of refugees and also

12:23

the descendant of prophets and kings.

12:30

From the Roman Empire's vantage point,

12:33

Imagine how threatening that is, that this one who marches into Jerusalem is pronounced

12:42

Son of God, descended from kings.

12:51

There were words that were written this week by our Synod Bishop talking about protests

12:57

about Palm Sunday processions and about that first entry into Jerusalem where she said

13:03

it's as if people start to find their voice and the empire pushes back. Because what is

13:11

at stake? The very legitimacy of the empire or of Jesus' claims? I also found myself this

13:24

week wondering why Jesus stirred things up so much. If he would have kept his

13:28

head down, he would have been okay. But what is the first thing he does in

13:32

Matthew's gospel when he goes into Jerusalem? But to start a fight with

13:39

people in the temple by dumping tables and chasing off money changers, and these

13:44

are his own people. It's an intra-faith sort of conflict.

13:55

And it doesn't end there. It's like he keeps poking at the bear.

14:02

There must have been plenty at stake. And it wasn't Jesus versus an entire

14:08

nation of people. It was really Jesus against systems that colluded together

14:14

to oppress entire nations of people. That's the difference.

14:24

Marches still go on. I forget the number, but there were several thousand just yesterday.

14:31

Did you catch headlines about that? No kings, no emperors, no tyrants?

14:35

Those marches happen across Canada and across the United States.

14:41

There's another march I would like to tell you about.

14:44

It's one that a friend of ours will participate in this afternoon.

14:48

as bishop of the Northwest Lower Michigan Synod

14:52

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Julie.

14:58

I think some of you might have met her

15:00

when she does it in my lecture.

15:04

But she will be joined by people

15:06

from 30 different counties in Michigan,

15:09

from the estimate 20 different faith groups.

15:14

So Christian and Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist,

15:20

and there are just a mosaic of different faiths

15:24

that will be represented.

15:27

And they figure there will be a few thousand people

15:30

who show up at the Capitol in Lansing this afternoon.

15:35

Here is the amazing part about that particular march.

15:39

They will be unified with one message.

15:42

All these people from all these places

15:44

and different faith expressions,

15:47

they are coming to affirm the value of three things.

15:53

To feed the hungry, to tend the sick,

15:58

and to welcome the stranger.

16:10

seems to me, but that march is quite a bit like the one that we did this morning and

16:18

certainly like the one when Jesus and the entourage make their way into Jerusalem.

16:25

That Jesus lives his life in continuity with an ancient tradition of loving God and loving

16:31

one another and yes, doing the very things that will be advocated this afternoon in Lansing,

16:38

Michigan.

17:08

(

17:09

to restore all things.

17:15

The march goes on.

17:17

Whether we're able to move our feet swiftly

17:20

or barely at all, the march is here too.

17:25

That we march to the cadence of doing justice,

17:29

of loving kindness, and walking mindfully before our God.

17:37

Amen.