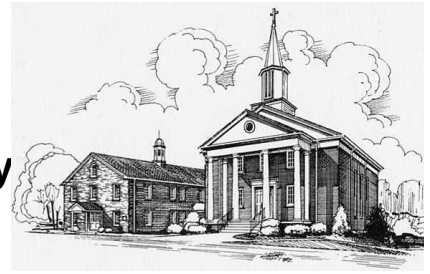


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

Year B
RCL



Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

The Liturgy of the Word

The Collect

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 Page 760, BCP

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let Israel now proclaim,
"His mercy endures for ever."
- 19 Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter them;
I will offer thanks to the LORD.
- 20 "This is the gate of the LORD;
he who is righteous may enter."
- 21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me
and have become my salvation.
- 22 The same stone which the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23 This is the LORD'S doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 On this day the LORD has acted;
we will rejoice and be glad in it.
- 25 Hosannah, LORD, hosannah!
LORD, send us now success.
- 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;
we bless you from the house of the LORD.
- 27 God is the LORD; he has shined upon us;
form a procession with branches up to the horns of the altar.
- 28 "You are my God, and I will thank you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you."
- 29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his mercy endures for ever.

SERMON

Familiarity breeds contempt. I bet that the first time you rode in an airplane you were so excited (or frightened) that you could hardly breathe. If you ride on airplanes regularly, though, it becomes about as exciting as riding a bus. That's the way we are about familiar things. I could not put it better than did Abraham Joshua Heschel:

As civilization advances, the sense of wonder almost necessarily declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.¹

So, what's the most familiar story to Christians? It is the Passion story and I can't help but wonder if we hear

¹ Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

it at all anymore.

What a tragedy! It is a long-standing tradition of the church to read the Passion out on Palm Sunday, and that's what I propose to do today in lieu of a sermon. We need to hear the story again, and walk with it. The best way I could think of to do that was to read it to you from an unfamiliar translation, "The Message".

Hear again the story of Holy Week. Mark writes:

In only two days the eight-day Festival of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread would begin. The high priests and religion scholars were looking for a way they could seize Jesus by stealth and kill him. They agreed that it should not be done during Passover Week. "We don't want the crowds up in arms," they said.

Jesus was at Bethany, a guest of Simon the Lep-
er. While he was eating dinner, a woman came up

carrying a bottle of very expensive perfume. Opening the bottle, she poured it on his head. Some of the guests became furious among themselves.

“That’s criminal! A sheer waste! This perfume could have been sold for well over a year’s wages and handed out to the poor.” They swelled up in anger, nearly bursting with indignation over her.

But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why are you giving her a hard time? She has just done something wonderfully significant for me. You will have the poor with you every day for the rest of your lives. Whenever you feel like it, you can do something for them. Not so with me. She did what she could when she could—she pre-anointed my body for burial. And you can be sure that wherever in the whole world the Message is preached, what she just did is going to be talked about admiringly.”

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the cabal of high priests, determined to betray him. They couldn't believe their ears, and promised to pay him well. He started looking for just the right moment to hand him over.

On the first of the Days of Unleavened Bread, the day they prepare the Passover sacrifice, his disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations so you can eat the Passover meal?"

He directed two of his disciples, "Go into the city. A man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him. Ask the owner of whichever house he enters, 'The Teacher wants to know, Where is my guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?' He will show you a spacious second-story room, swept and ready. Prepare for us

there.”

The disciples left, came to the city, found everything just as he had told them, and prepared the Passover meal.

After sunset he came with the Twelve. As they were at the supper table eating, Jesus said, “I have something hard but important to say to you: One of you is going to hand me over to the conspirators, one who at this moment is eating with me.”

Stunned, they started asking, one after another, “It isn’t me, is it?”

He said, “It’s one of the Twelve, one who eats with me out of the same bowl. In one sense, it turns out that the Son of Man is entering into a way of treachery well-marked by the Scriptures—no surprises here. In another sense, the man who

turns him in, turns traitor to the Son of Man—better never to have been born than do this!”

In the course of their meal, having taken and blessed the bread, he broke it and gave it to them. Then he said,

Take, this is my body.

Taking the chalice, he gave it to them, thanking God, and they all drank from it. He said,

**This is my blood,
God’s new covenant,
Poured out for many people.**

“I’ll not be drinking wine again until the new day when I drink it in the kingdom of God.”

They sang a hymn and then went directly to Mount Olives.

Jesus told them, “You’re all going to feel that your world is falling apart and that it’s my fault. There’s a Scripture that says,

**I will strike the shepherd;
The sheep will go helter-skelter.**

“But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you, leading the way to Galilee.”

Peter blurted out, “Even if everyone else is ashamed of you when things fall to pieces, I won’t be.”

Jesus said, “Don’t be so sure. Today, this very night in fact, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”

He blustered in protest, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you.” All the others said the same thing.

They came to an area called Gethsemane. Jesus told his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James, and John with him. He plunged into a sinkhole of dreadful agony. He told them, “I feel

bad enough right now to die. Stay here and keep vigil with me.”

Going a little ahead, he fell to the ground and prayed for a way out: “Papa, Father, you can—can’t you?—get me out of this. Take this cup away from me. But please, not what I want—what do *you* want?”

He came back and found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, “Simon, you went to sleep on me? Can’t you stick it out with me a single hour? Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don’t enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don’t be naive. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire.”

He then went back and prayed the same prayer. Returning, he again found them sound asleep.

They simply couldn't keep their eyes open, and they didn't have a plausible excuse.

He came back a third time and said, "Are you going to sleep all night? No—you've slept long enough. Time's up. The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let's get going. My betrayer has arrived."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when Judas, the one out of the Twelve, showed up, and with him a gang of ruffians, sent by the high priests, religion scholars, and leaders, brandishing swords and clubs. The betrayer had worked out a signal with them: "The one I kiss, that's the one—seize him. Make sure he doesn't get away." He went straight to Jesus and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The others then grabbed him and roughed him up. One of the men standing there

unsheathed his sword, swung, and came down on the Chief Priest's servant, lopping off the man's ear.

Jesus said to them, "What is this, coming after me with swords and clubs as if I were a dangerous criminal? Day after day I've been sitting in the Temple teaching, and you never so much as lifted a hand against me. What you in fact have done is confirm the prophetic writings." All the disciples cut and ran.

A young man was following along. All he had on was a bedsheet. Some of the men grabbed him but he got away, running off naked, leaving them holding the sheet.

They led Jesus to the Chief Priest, where the high priests, religious leaders, and scholars had gathered together. Peter followed at a safe dis-

tance until they got to the Chief Priest's courtyard, where he mingled with the servants and warmed himself at the fire.

The high priests conspiring with the Jewish Council looked high and low for evidence against Jesus by which they could sentence him to death. They found nothing. Plenty of people were willing to bring in false charges, but nothing added up, and they ended up canceling each other out. Then a few of them stood up and lied: "We heard him say, 'I am going to tear down this Temple, built by hard labor, and in three days build another without lifting a hand.'" But even they couldn't agree exactly.

In the middle of this, the Chief Priest stood up and asked Jesus, "What do you have to say to the accusation?" Jesus was silent. He said nothing.

The Chief Priest tried again, this time asking,
“Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?”

Jesus said, “Yes, I am, and you’ll see it yourself:

The Son of Man seated
At the right hand of the Mighty One,
Arriving on the clouds of heaven.”

The Chief Priest lost his temper. Ripping his clothes, he yelled, “Did you hear that? After that do we need witnesses? You heard the blasphemy. Are you going to stand for it?”

They condemned him, one and all. The sentence: death.

Some of them started spitting at him. They blindfolded his eyes, then hit him, saying, “Who hit you? Prophecy!” The guards, punching and slapping, took him away.

While all this was going on, Peter was down in

the courtyard. One of the Chief Priest's servant girls came in and, seeing Peter warming himself there, looked hard at him and said, "You were with the Nazarene, Jesus."

He denied it: "I don't know what you're talking about." He went out on the porch. A rooster crowed.

The girl spotted him and began telling the people standing around, "He's one of them." He denied it again.

After a little while, the bystanders brought it up again. "You've *got* to be one of them. You've got 'Galilean' written all over you."

Now Peter got really nervous and swore, "I never laid eyes on this man you're talking about." Just then the rooster crowed a second time. Peter remembered how Jesus had said, "Before a rooster

crows twice, you'll deny me three times." He collapsed in tears.

At dawn's first light, the high priests, with the religious leaders and scholars, arranged a conference with the entire Jewish Council. After tying Jesus securely, they took him out and presented him to Pilate.

Pilate asked him, "Are you the 'King of the Jews'?"

He answered, "If you say so." The high priests let loose a barrage of accusations.

Pilate asked again, "Aren't you going to answer anything? That's quite a list of accusations." Still, he said nothing. Pilate was impressed, really impressed.

It was a custom at the Feast to release a prisoner, anyone the people asked for. There was one

prisoner called Barabbas, locked up with the insurrectionists who had committed murder during the uprising against Rome. As the crowd came up and began to present its petition for him to release a prisoner, Pilate anticipated them: “Do you want me to release the King of the Jews to you?” Pilate knew by this time that it was through sheer spite that the high priests had turned Jesus over to him.

But the high priests by then had worked up the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas. Pilate came back, “So what do I do with this man you call King of the Jews?”

They yelled, “Nail him to a cross!”

Pilate objected, “But for what crime?”

But they yelled all the louder, “Nail him to a cross!”

Pilate gave the crowd what it wanted, set Barab-

bas free and turned Jesus over for whipping and crucifixion.

The soldiers took Jesus into the palace and called together the entire brigade. They dressed him up in purple and put a crown plaited from a thorn bush on his head. Then they began their mockery: “Bravo, King of the Jews!” They banged on his head with a club, spit on him, and knelt down in mock worship. After they had had their fun, they took off the purple cape and put his own clothes back on him. Then they marched out to nail him to the cross.

There was a man walking by, coming from work, Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. They made him carry Jesus’ cross.

The soldiers brought Jesus to Golgotha, meaning “Skull Hill.” They offered him a mild painkiller (wine

mixed with myrrh), but he wouldn't take it. And they nailed him to the cross. They divided up his clothes and threw dice to see who would get them.

They nailed him up at nine o'clock in the morning. The charge against him—the king of the jews—was printed on a poster. Along with him, they crucified two criminals, one to his right, the other to his left. People passing along the road jeered, shaking their heads in mock lament: “You bragged that you could tear down the Temple and then rebuild it in three days—so show us your stuff! Save yourself! If you're really God's Son, come down from that cross!”

The high priests, along with the religion scholars, were right there mixing it up with the rest of them, having a great time poking fun at him: “He saved others—but he can't save himself! Messiah, is he?”

King of Israel? Then let him climb down from that cross. We'll *all* become believers then!" Even the men crucified alongside him joined in the mockery.

At noon the sky became extremely dark. The darkness lasted three hours. At three o'clock, Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Some of the bystanders who heard him said, "Listen, he's calling for Elijah." Someone ran off, soaked a sponge in sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down."

But Jesus, with a loud cry, gave his last breath. At that moment the Temple curtain ripped right down the middle. When the Roman captain standing guard in front of him saw that he had quit

breathing, he said, “This has to be the Son of God!”

There were women watching from a distance, among them Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and Joses, and Salome. When Jesus was in Galilee, these women followed and served him, and had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Late in the afternoon, since it was the Day of Preparation (that is, Sabbath eve), Joseph of Arimathea, a highly respected member of the Jewish Council, came. He was one who lived expectantly, on the lookout for the kingdom of God. Working up his courage, he went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate questioned whether he could be dead that soon and called for the captain to verify that he was really dead. Assured by the captain,

he gave Joseph the corpse.

Having already purchased a linen shroud, Joseph took him down, wrapped him in the shroud, placed him in a tomb that had been cut into the rock, and rolled a large stone across the opening. Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Joses, watched the burial.²

AMEN

² The Message (MSG)
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