

✠ I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

**O**ur liturgy begins by remembering the Triumphal procession of Jesus with his disciples into Jerusalem. Everyone expects Jesus, at last, to become King. He has just raised Lazarus from the dead. Now he begins the trek to Jerusalem. The Passover is at hand. His rise to become King is all but inevitable. What could possibly stop it? But as we know, and as we heard from Mathew's Passion, things take a dark, sour, terrible turn.

The chief priests and elders had been finalizing their plot against Jesus—it has to take place as soon as possible—but it can't happen on Passover. Judas, hearing of it, finds them and a way to profit off of their deceit.

Meanwhile, Jesus shares the Passover meal with his disciples. Then, they leave to the Garden. Jesus takes his top three lieutenants to watch and pray; they cannot, and do not, and fall asleep. Then, there in the Garden, Jesus is betrayed. The disciples, who have seen Jesus escape from death many times, are surely beyond surprised that Jesus submits to this arrest—immediately they abandon him. The priests flock to him, seeking a charge that will legitimize their murderous envy. Peter denies Jesus.

But then there seems to be a bit of hope. Pilate seems to have found a way to get Jesus out of this mess, offering to release either Jesus or the murderer-insurrectionist Barabbas. It's an easy choice. But that effort is destroyed by the treachery of the priests again—they call for Barrabas to be released, and the crowd agrees. The crowd that shouted *Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!* devolves into the crowd that shouts *Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!*

**J**esus doesn't talk back or fight back. He is the sheep led to the slaughter. Everyone, from the priests to the soldiers to the criminals crucified takes their shot at him—mocking, beating, taunting. To everyone there, it seems, after all, that everyone had gotten Jesus wrong. He's going to be killed. God isn't intervening to save him.

Within one week, the certainty that Christ would be crowned the King became the horror that he was crucified.

The devils and the priests *seem* to have won. Have they? But they haven't; they haven't at all. Not even the priests and the Pharisees believe that they have won. The end of the Passion gives them away:

*[62] The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate [63] and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' [64] Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.'*

These priests—somehow far more so than the disciples—have been paying attention to what Jesus had been saying. They expect the disciples to believe that Jesus would rise from the dead! They expect at least a false resurrection! They know what Jesus has said. They give the disciples more credit than they deserve. These priests had been listening to Jesus very closely.

The disciples *should* have known. They should have known, because Jesus told them what was happening. And that's because Jesus knew what was happening, and told them. In fact, each time Jesus spoke, he showed them, the priests, the crowds, even Pilate, that through all of this, God was being proved right. Everything was taking place according to the Scriptures.

What took place wasn't unbridled chaos, wasn't unplanned, wasn't evil that had somehow won. What took place, throughout this whole Passion—this Holy Week—was the death that Jesus had come to accomplish. It wasn't the victory of satan, the demons, evil, and death; it is none other than the victory of God.

The crucifixion *is* the coronation ceremony of Jesus. This is the story of how Jesus became King.

**Matthew** takes great effort to make the point that things unfolded exactly as they were supposed to unfold: Jesus told his disciples what was going to happen, and then it happened. All these things happened just as the prophets prophesied long ago. All the things done and all the words that were meant as mockery are true: for Jesus is the Christ, the King of the Jews.

Everything looks like the defeat of Jesus and his disciples from the vantage point of everyone except for Jesus. It is not defeat; it is the Father's plan unfolding, carried out by the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is, in Jesus' own words, what Jesus has come to *accomplish*. He *accomplishes* death.

Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, the betrayal of Judas, the abandonment by his disciples, and Peter's denial.

*[1] When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, [2] "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."*

Jesus sketches out the whole playbook for his disciples ahead of time; in fact, he's been preparing them for his death and resurrection since at least the Transfiguration. But he does it again right before the Feast of the Passover, for this is the week his death will be accomplished.

*[21] And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."*

Then, after dinner, after the disciples had gone out into the Garden—and remember! it was a Garden where our Lord was first betrayed—Judas betrays Jesus.

*[31] Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

There in the Garden, at Jesus' arrest, the disciples abandon him. But some follow at a distance, still curious to see how everything plays out.

*[34] Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.*

By the charcoal fire, as he tries to see and hear what is going to happen, Peter denies Jesus. "I do not know the man."

It looked to anyone other than Jesus that Jesus has failed. But that isn't what took place at all. Jesus knew and told the disciples exactly what would happen. Things, despite appearances, are happening according to his Father's will—for the Father is using the sins of the priests, the Pharisees, the disciples, Judas, the crowds, and Pilate to bring about the very end of sin itself.

**Everyone** has abandoned Jesus. Peter has denied him. The priests have condemned him to death. Pilate's last ditch offer of releasing Jesus for Barabbas fails—and knowing his innocence, he condemns Jesus all the same. Jesus will be crucified. Everything happened just as Jesus said it would happen. This is what Jesus had come to do.

But there's one piece of this puzzle that doesn't fit yet. There's one piece of this puzzle that seems to contradict this entire message:

*[45] Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. [46] And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

These words make us think that there is something unexpected, that there is something here that Jesus truly doesn't understand about his Father, that Jesus doesn't understand what is happening.

But Jesus does—and these are, quite to the contrary, the very words that prove it. And that's because this isn't a question, it's the antiphon. It's the first line of Psalm 22. It's the psalm we hear at the close of the Maundy Thursday service, as the altar is being stripped. We hear it because it's the one Jesus invokes.

**What** is meant by that line—*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*<sup>2</sup>—is what is contained in the entire psalm. That might seem strange to us, but it's as simple as knowing that when I say "Our Father," you know to begin praying the whole of the Lord's Prayer. The bigger question is this, "Why is Jesus bringing up *this* psalm?" Why does Jesus want the priests, the crowd, and us to think of Psalm 22?

We'll look at just one stanza. Towards the end of the psalm is this curious stanza:

*[27] All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD,*

*and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.*

*[28] For kingship belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations. (Psalm 22:27–28, ESV)*

Jesus is letting us all in on the mystery of this psalm, that its fulfillment is at hand.

To whom shall all the ends of the earth turn? Who shall all the families of the nations worship? To whom belongs kingship? Who rules over the nations?

You see, the crowd who shouted *Hosanna!* was right all along, and the disciples were right all along. For it was upon his death that Jesus was exalted as *this* King.

**Christ** the Lord is worthy of all worship and praise and glory and honor and majesty, now and forever. **Amen and amen.**