

A Palm Sunday 2026
St Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA
The Rev. David Rider
April 13, 2025

Matthew 2:1-11

Once again, we begin a rollercoaster week in which we walk with Jesus amid his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his shocking arrest, trial, final night of waiting and sadistic crucifixion

Although most of us have been to Holy Week many times, its story line continues to assault our senses

Holy Week remains as horrific as attending a high-society wedding, only to have the bride or groom murdered in front of our eyes

At some point in every Holy Week, I find myself wondering whether there could have been an easier way, perhaps with Jesus bestowing benedictions in old age before succumbing from pneumonia or congestive heart failure

In our own world racked with gratuitous violence, can't we just take a deep breath and just give peace a chance?

For 2000 years, we Christians have reflected on the highs and lows of Holy Week

Over the centuries, our forebearers came up with a half-dozen deep theories regarding Jesus's necessary suffering, including whether he was an overwhelmed victim or a victorious and atoning savior offering sacrificial love on our behalf

I will not burden us today with all those faith claims over the centuries

Instead, I wish to reflect on what Matthew's gospel witness might offer for our Holy Week reflection

To be specific, we have heard two versions of Matthew's gospel, including one we read outside the chapel before our procession into the church

In that first reading, we experience drama and mixed emotion as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem astride a colt

The crowds embody high passion, likely some high-fives and—if it were today—thousands of selfies taken in front of a celebrity because that's what we do today

But Matthew also reminds us of this: When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

Turmoil—the dystopian drumbeat toward Golgotha had already begun

Our extended Passion reading that we just heard takes us through the tragic detail of human suffering, mob crowd reaction, and redemptive death

We know its story line and painful climax all too well

Yet Matthew provides us with a few distinctive details

Matthew, for instance, has Jesus predicting his betrayer at the Passover meal

Matthew gives us more context of the palace of the high priest and its focus on the Jewish role in his death

At Gethsemane, Jesus seems less distressed in Matthew's story than he does in Mark's version of Holy Week

The trial itself gives us more material unique to Matthew, including its vivid, dramatic imagery of 'innocent blood' with echoes of the OT

Always a bit more given to drama, Matthew tells us about Judas's silver pieces, his suicide and burial in Potters Field

At the end, only Matthew adds the cosmic drama of an earthquake with Jesus' final breath

As always for Matthew, nearly every punchline includes a claim that Jesus is fulfilling the OT, yet he also looks beyond Israel toward the Gentiles

Like Mark, Matthew dwells on the blood, sweat and tears of human betrayal and gruesome crucifixion with the final cry of Jesus's godforsakenness being, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

When we get to this point in the story, the final crescendo after many for this week, notice what does **not** happen

Jesus is not filled with victimization, rage or desire for retribution

He does not blame the world for his pending doom or hurl threats maledictions at his tormentors

In the midst of his own suffering, he still, authentically, cares more about the people around him than about his own anguish

Out of his vocation, Jesus anguishes over the world he's worked to love and reconcile to God

In our spiritual reflection during Holy Week, our tradition embraces two versions of the passion story for those who are able to attend multiples liturgies

On Palm Sunday each year, we follow the lectionary cycle that rotates from Matthew to Mark to Luke, all of which confront the more tragic side of Jesus's sacrificial death—blood, sweat and tears on behalf of the world's atonement and redemption

Every Good Friday, however, we always read the Passion story from John's Gospel, which emphasizes the triumphant and regal nature of Jesus's earthly ministry, including his sacrificial death as the ultimate act of God's love for humanity

In John's gospel, it is inconceivable that Jesus would ever become a victim

For John, Jesus stares down the forces of human evil, even as he freely absorbs evil's consequence in the crucifixion as his ultimate act of sacrificial love for you and me

Our Holy Week observance allows these two divergent witnesses to live in loving and dynamic tension

I invite you to keep this dynamic tension in your prayers in the coming days, as we walk and watch with Jesus the savior

Join us in the coming days, as we navigate the story and reflect more deeply on its highs and lows

In the coming days, Jesus prepares for the race of human salvation, his blood, sweat, tears and focused concentration given for human redemption, his ultimate gift of love and salvation for this beautiful, terrible, wonderful world we are called to serve