



## Liturgical Day: Palm / Passion Sunday

Date: April 5, 2009

Sermon Title: See the Son of God

Passion; Redemption;  
"Truly this man was God's Son!"  
Jesus Christ saves us.

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we began our worship this morning, it was Palm Sunday. The church's tradition for years has been to remember, on the Sunday preceding Easter, our Lord's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem for the last time. With the crowds who welcomed Jesus that day, we too waived our palm branches in the air, and sang his praises.

But if you've been paying attention to the worship folder, you will have noticed that it is now Passion Sunday – a relatively new tradition for us Lutherans, but an important one. Instead of just focusing on the triumphant entrance at the beginning of Holy Week, we now take time to consider the entire last week of Jesus' life. We stand alongside him as the crowds turn against him. We cringe as the Roman soldiers humiliate him and abuse him. We weep with the women as he is nailed to the cross. We look on with admiration as Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for Jesus' body, and gives it a proper burial.

There are those who would question our judgment for doing this. There are those who would claim that it is too dark; too depressing; too sad. But that doesn't deter us. We do this every year, as an invitation: an invitation into a better understanding of the mission and ministry of Jesus; an invitation into experiencing the redemption that is ours in his death and resurrection; an invitation into experiencing the hope and peace that God wants to share with us.

You see, we believe that the only way to true hope and peace is through death and resurrection. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Martin Luther and his colleagues had a way of speaking about that. They talked about the difference between a *Theology of Glory* and a *Theology of the Cross*. Those who subscribe to a *Theology of Glory* shy away from the darkness of holy week. They believe that the life of a Christian is supposed to be one success after another, so they are happy to show up for Palm Sunday, and the exuberant welcome of the crowds. They are happy to show up for Easter Sunday, and the celebration of the resurrection. But they are reluctant to have anything to do with what lies between. On the other hand, those who subscribe to a *Theology of the Cross* understand that Easter is only good news when it is an answer to the brokenness and pain of this world. They understand that there is no reason to sing "Alleluia" on Easter Sunday until you have heard the crowd shout "Crucify him" on Good Friday.

This particular Sunday promotes that kind of thinking. It is like a movie trailer – intending to give us a glimpse of what is going to take place here over the next few days. It is an invitation for you and me to join God's people in worship as we explore Christ's passion. It is an invitation for you and me to explore our own individual need for God's forgiveness and renewal. It is an invitation for us to gather together, at the foot of the cross, in all of our brokenness. It is an invitation for us to experience the new life that God so

desperately wants to share with us. And we receive this invitation, because the church believes that what takes place this week in worship stands at the

FIRST LESSON  
ISAIAH 50:4-9A

PSALM  
PSALM 31:9-16

SECOND LESSON  
PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

GOSPEL LESSON  
ST. MARK 14:1-15:47  
OR

ST. MARK 15:1-39 [40-47]

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL  
ST. MARK 11:1-11

OR  
ST. JOHN 12:12-16

PRAYER OF THE DAY  
SOVEREIGN GOD, YOU HAVE  
ESTABLISHED YOUR RULE IN THE  
HUMAN HEART THROUGH THE  
SERVANTHOOD OF JESUS CHRIST.  
BY YOUR SPIRIT, KEEP US IN THE  
JOYFUL PROCESSION OF THOSE  
WHO WITH THEIR TONGUES  
CONFESS JESUS AS LORD AND WITH  
THEIR LIVES PRAISE HIM AS  
SAVIOR, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS  
WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
ONE GOD, NOW AND FOREVER.  
AMEN.

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very heart of our faith.

As some of you know, I have been thinking, this past week, about the people who surrounded Jesus during the last week of his life. There were those who had been expecting great things from him. Palm Sunday made sense to them: it seemed as though all of Jerusalem was welcoming this new King. Glory was at hand. God's rule was about to be re-established in that Holy City. Palm Sunday made good sense to them, but Holy Week was nothing less than devastating. The events of that week seemed to pile up against Jesus, and against the expectations they had for him. As the tide turned, and as Jesus seemed to be helpless to resist it, their dreams of glory were crushed. In his suffering and death they saw the demise of their own hopes, and by Friday night they were all but resigned to give up on him and wait for another.

There were those who had been expecting great things from Jesus, and there were those who opposed him from the start: who had been secretly plotting to do away with him. Palm Sunday was very distressing to them. They were deeply concerned about the kind of support Jesus seemed to be getting from the crowds. They worried about what might happen if that continued. They continued to scheme in the shadows, and as the week played out, it seemed as though they were succeeding. This radical, errant Rabbi from Nazareth seemed to be getting exactly what he had coming to him. By Friday night they were relieved: Jesus was out of the way, and would no longer be a threat to them.

There were those who supported him. There were those who opposed him. And then there was this Centurion. He hadn't come to encourage or to oppose Jesus. He was just there to do his job. He was responsible for his troops, and he made sure they did what they were supposed to do. They kept a close eye on Jesus in custody, to make sure that he wouldn't escape. They treated him harshly: after all, that was the purpose, wasn't it? Rome persecuted and crucified its opponents to make sure that onlookers understood the consequences of opposing the government. They led him up the hill, drove the nails into his hands, put the cross in place, and waited for him to die. The Centurion coordinated this work with his soldiers. He had done it countless times before, and one would have expected that when this job was done he would unceremoniously have returned to his superiors and picked up his next assignment.

But something happened. As Jesus took his last breath, he saw something. Others had seen Jesus perform miracles, cast out demons, and teach in ways that stirred the crowds. Others had seen far more of Jesus than this man ever did. But the Centurion saw what was most important. He saw, in Jesus' suffering and death, that he was nothing less than the very son of God. We never hear of this Centurion again, but we can only imagine the impact this moment had on his life.

That's why we don't close up the doors to this place on Palm Sunday, and leave them closed until Easter morning comes around. That's why we'll be here on Tuesday to extend and receive the gifts of healing and forgiveness. That's why we'll be here on Thursday to hear of the very last meal Jesus had with his disciples. That's why we'll be here on Friday to meditate on the cross, and the price he paid for us. That's why we'll be here in vigil on Saturday, waiting for the first light of Easter dawn. It isn't an easy journey to take. For those of us who love Jesus, each year brings it's own share of pain to us. But we'll be here, hoping to glimpse what the Centurion saw: that in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we come face-to-face with God. That in the self-giving love that he extends to us, we meet the grace of God.

Passion Sunday is an invitation to Holy Week, so I invite you to come and see what you can see. Come and feast on the depths of God's love. Come and receive the grace that is ours in Jesus Christ. Come and see what it means to have a God was present in our Lord's death and dying, and who is with us even in the darkest chapters of our own life's journey. Come and see the power of the one who defeats sin and death once and for all.

Come and see, and perhaps you, like the Centurion, will leave this week with an even deeper conviction that, truly, this man is God's son.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (April 5, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>15:1</sup>1 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." <sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests accused him of many things. <sup>4</sup> Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

<sup>6</sup> Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. <sup>7</sup> Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. <sup>8</sup> So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. <sup>9</sup> Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" <sup>10</sup> For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. <sup>12</sup> Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" <sup>13</sup> They shouted back, "Crucify him!" <sup>14</sup> Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" <sup>15</sup> So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>16</sup> Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. <sup>17</sup> And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. <sup>18</sup> And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" <sup>19</sup> They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. <sup>20</sup> After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

<sup>21</sup> They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. <sup>22</sup> Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). <sup>23</sup> And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

<sup>25</sup> It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." <sup>27</sup> And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>29</sup> Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> save yourself, and come down from the cross!" <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. <sup>32</sup> Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

<sup>33</sup> When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>35</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." <sup>36</sup> And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." <sup>37</sup> Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. <sup>38</sup> And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

[<sup>40</sup> There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

<sup>42</sup> When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, <sup>43</sup> Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>44</sup> Then

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church\\_year/lectionary.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html).

Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. <sup>45</sup> When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. <sup>46</sup> Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. <sup>47</sup> Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.] <sup>ii</sup>

#### Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

<sup>15:1</sup> Καὶ εὐθὺς πρῶτῃ συμβούλιον ποιήσαντες οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς μετὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ γραμματέων καὶ ὄλον τὸ συνέδριον, δῆσαντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπήνεγκαν καὶ παρέδωκαν Πιλάτῳ. <sup>2</sup> Καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτὸν ὁ Πιλάτος· σὺ εἶ ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων; ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῷ λέγει· σὺ λέγεις. <sup>3</sup> καὶ κατηγοροῦν αὐτοῦ οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς πολλά. <sup>4</sup> ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος πάλιν ἐπηρώτα αὐτὸν λέγων· οὐκ ἀποκρίνη οὐδέν; ἴδε πόσα σου κατηγοροῦσιν. <sup>5</sup> ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς οὐκέτι οὐδὲν ἀπεκρίθη, ὥστε θαυμάζειν τὸν Πιλάτον.

<sup>6</sup> Κατὰ δὲ ἑορτὴν ἀπέλυεν αὐτοῖς ἓνα δέσμιον ὃν παρητοῦντο. <sup>7</sup> ἦν δὲ ὁ λεγόμενος Βαραββᾶς μετὰ τῶν στασιασῶν δεδεμένος οἷτινες ἐν τῇ στάσει φόνον πεποιήκεισαν. <sup>8</sup> καὶ ἀναβὰς ὁ ὄχλος ἤρξατο αἰτεῖσθαι καθὼς ἐποίει αὐτοῖς. <sup>9</sup> ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς λέγων· θέλετε ἀπολύσω ὑμῖν τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων; <sup>10</sup> ἐγίνωσκεν γὰρ ὅτι διὰ φθόνον παραδεδώκεισαν αὐτὸν οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς. <sup>11</sup> οἱ δὲ ἄρχιερεῖς ἀνέσεισαν τὸν ὄχλον ἵνα μᾶλλον τὸν Βαραββᾶν ἀπολύσῃ αὐτοῖς. <sup>12</sup> ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος πάλιν ἀποκριθεὶς ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· τί οὖν [θέλετε] ποιήσω [ὃν λέγετε] τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Ἰουδαίων; <sup>13</sup> οἱ δὲ πάλιν ἔκραξαν· σταύρωσον αὐτόν. <sup>14</sup> ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς· τί γὰρ ἐποίησεν κακόν; οἱ δὲ περισσῶς ἔκραξαν· σταύρωσον αὐτόν. <sup>15</sup> Ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος βουλόμενος τῷ ὄχλῳ τὸ ἱκανὸν ποιῆσαι ἀπέλυσεν αὐτοῖς τὸν Βαραββᾶν, καὶ παρέδωκεν τὸν Ἰησοῦν φραγελλώσας ἵνα σταυρωθῇ.

<sup>16</sup> Οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν πραιτώριον, καὶ συγκαλοῦσιν ὄλην τὴν σπεῖραν. <sup>17</sup> καὶ ἐνδιδύσκουσιν αὐτὸν πορφύραν καὶ περιτιθέασιν αὐτῷ πλέξαντες ἀκάθινον στέφανον. <sup>18</sup> καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν· χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων. <sup>19</sup> καὶ ἔτυπτον αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν καλάμῳ καὶ ἐνέπτυν αὐτῷ καὶ τιθέντες τὰ γόνατα προσεκύνουν αὐτῷ. <sup>20</sup> καὶ ὅτε ἐνέπαιξαν αὐτῷ, ἐξέδυσαν αὐτὸν τὴν πορφύραν καὶ ἐνέδυσαν αὐτόν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐξάγουσιν αὐτόν ἵνα σταυρώσωσιν αὐτόν.

<sup>21</sup> καὶ ἀγγαρεύουσιν παράγοντα τινα Σίμωνα Κυρηναῖον ἐρχόμενον ἀπ' ἀγροῦ, τὸν πατέρα Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ Ρούφου, ἵνα ἄρῃ τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ. <sup>22</sup> Καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτόν ἐπὶ τὸν Γολγοθᾶν τόπον, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον Κρανίου Τόπος. <sup>23</sup> καὶ ἐδίδουν αὐτῷ ἔσμυρμισμένον οἶνον· ὃς δὲ οὐκ ἔλαβεν.

<sup>24</sup> Καὶ σταυροῦσιν αὐτόν

καὶ διαμερίζονται τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ,

βάλλοντες κλῆρον ἐπ' αὐτὰ τίς τί ἄρῃ.

<sup>25</sup> ἦν δὲ ὥρα τρίτη καὶ ἐσταύρωσαν αὐτόν. <sup>26</sup> καὶ ἦν ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας αὐτοῦ ἐπιγεγραμμένη· ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. <sup>27</sup> Καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ σταυροῦσιν δύο ληστᾶς, ἓνα ἐκ δεξιῶν καὶ ἓνα ἐξ ἐωνύμων αὐτοῦ. <sup>29</sup> Καὶ οἱ παραπορευόμενοι ἐβλασφήμουν αὐτόν κινούμενοι τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ λέγοντες· οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, <sup>30</sup> σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβάς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.

<sup>31</sup> ὁμοίως καὶ οἱ ἄρχιερεῖς ἐμπαίζοντες πρὸς ἀλλήλους μετὰ τῶν γραμματέων ἔλεγον· ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι. <sup>32</sup> ὁ χριστὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραὴλ καταβάτω νῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν. καὶ οἱ συνεσταυρωμένοι σὺν αὐτῷ ὠνείδιζον αὐτόν.

<sup>33</sup> Καὶ γενομένης ὥρας ἕκτης σκότος ἐγένετο ἐφ' ὅλην τὴν γῆν ἕως ὥρας ἐνάτης. <sup>34</sup> καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· **ἐλωι ἐλωι λεμα σαβαχθανι;** ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον· **ὁ θεός**

<sup>ii</sup> St. John 12:20-33, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

**μου ὁ θεός μου, εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπες με;** <sup>35</sup>καὶ τινες τῶν παρεστηκότων ἀκούσαντες ἔλεγον· ἶδε Ἥλιαν φωνεῖ. <sup>36</sup>δραμῶν δέ τις [καὶ] γεμίσας σπόγγον ὄξους περιθεὶς καλάμῳ ἐπότιζεν αὐτόν λέγων· ἄφετε ἴδωμεν εἰ ἔρχεται Ἥλιος καθελεῖν αὐτόν. <sup>37</sup>ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἀφείς φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐξέπνευσεν. <sup>38</sup>Καὶ τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσχίσθη εἰς δύο ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω. <sup>39</sup>ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ κεντυρίων ὁ παρεστηκὸς ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὕτως ἐξέπνευσεν εἶπεν· ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν. [<sup>40</sup> Ἦσαν δὲ καὶ γυναῖκες ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι, ἐν αἷς καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ καὶ Σαλώμη, <sup>41</sup>αἱ ὅτε ἦν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ αἱ συναναβάσαι αὐτῷ εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα.

<sup>42</sup>Καὶ ἤδη ὀψίας γενομένης, ἐπεὶ ἦν παρασκευὴ ἧ ἔστιν προσάββατον, <sup>43</sup>ἔλθων Ἰωσήφ [ὁ] ἀπὸ Ἀριμαθαίας εὐσχήμων βουλευτῆς, ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν προσδεχόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, τολμήσας εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν Πιλάτον καὶ ἠτήσατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. <sup>44</sup>ὁ δὲ Πιλάτος ἐθαύμασεν εἰ ἤδη τέθνηκεν καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν κεντυρίωνα ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτόν εἰ πάλαι ἀπέθανεν. <sup>45</sup>καὶ γνοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ κεντυρίωνος ἐδώρησατο τὸ πτώμα τῷ Ἰωσήφ. <sup>46</sup>καὶ ἀγοράσας σινδόνα καθελὼν αὐτόν ἐνείλησεν τῇ σινδόνι καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτόν ἐν μνημείῳ ὃ ἦν λελατομημένον ἐκ πέτρας καὶ προσεκύλισεν λίθον ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν τοῦ μνημείου. <sup>47</sup>ἡ δὲ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰωσήτος ἐθεώρουν ποῦ τέθειται.] <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>iii</sup> St. John 12:20-33, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).