

# THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from  
Region 6



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## **Palm Sunday / Passion Sunday, Year A**

*Bishop Daniel Beaudoin, Northwestern Ohio Synod*

Gospel Text - Matthew 27:11-54

### **Matthew 27:11-54**

<sup>11</sup> Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." <sup>12</sup> But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" <sup>14</sup> But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup> Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. <sup>16</sup> At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" <sup>18</sup> For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. <sup>19</sup> While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." <sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. <sup>21</sup> The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." <sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" <sup>23</sup> Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing but rather that a riot was

beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."<sup>25</sup> Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"<sup>26</sup> So he released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup> Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, <sup>29</sup> and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" <sup>30</sup> They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. <sup>31</sup> After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup> As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), <sup>34</sup> they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. <sup>35</sup> And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; <sup>36</sup> then they sat down there and kept watch over him. <sup>37</sup> Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

<sup>38</sup> Then two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>39</sup> Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." <sup>41</sup> In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, <sup>42</sup> "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, 'I am God's Son.' " <sup>44</sup> The rebels who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

<sup>45</sup> From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>46</sup> And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>47</sup> When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." <sup>48</sup> At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to

him to drink. <sup>49</sup> But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup> Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. <sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup> After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup> Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

## **SERMON TEXT:**

Grace and peace to you...

You may have noticed that this morning's worship has a double theme. There is the theme of palms and there is the theme of passion. We read in Matthew, how the holy city welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday only to turn against Him on Good Friday.

Holy Week begins with that great and glorious entry, with the waving of palms, and with shouts of "**Hosanna!**" But how quickly things go from glorious to good, and from bad to worse. 5 days later the waving of palms becomes the shaking of fists. Shouts of, "**Hail Him**" become cries of "**Crucify him!**" "**So, Pilate releases Barabbas, and after flogging Jesus, he hands over the Christ to be crucified.**"

It took just 5 days to move from a coronation to a crucifixion.

What was it that turned a day of praise, into a day of pain?

Now we read in the Bible that Jesus draws crowds wherever He goes. They come from all over to see Him, to witness His miracles, and to hear His teaching. But in any crowd - then and now - you get both kinds of folks. You get the faithful and the fickle. You get the lovers and the haters. You get the good and the bad. You see, Jesus not only inspired wonder; He also inspired anger. This is the Sunday when you get both the exultant and the enraged.

But if you read the Bible close enough, you discover some characters who don't quite fit the mold. They're not "either" and they're not "or". Like the owner of the Palm Sunday donkey that Jesus rides in on. The disciples simply say "**The Lord needs it**", so the owner agrees to let them take it. Or Pilate's wife, who has a dream about Jesus, and sends her husband, the governor, a message, "**Have nothing to do with this man He is innocent.**" Or the Roman centurion, who carries out his orders and crucifies the Christ, only to realize by His death, "**Truly, this man is the Son of God.**"

There are some folks who don't quite fit the mold. Including a man named Simon, who has come down to us as the bearer of Christ's cross. In the Passion story, according to St. Matthew, Simon of Cyrene appears in only 1 verse, in Matthew 27: 32. "As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they compelled this man to carry his cross." *Simon appears from out of the shadows, stage left, he bears the cross of Jesus, but he never gets a speaking part.*

Now we know from the other Gospels that Simon is a visitor to Jerusalem. He comes from Cyrene, a city in North Africa. And with a name like Simon, it is likely that he is Jewish. And he is in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

So, picture the scene. Simon has just arrived. He's in the heart of the holy city. He's wandering the streets. Taking in all the sights, the sounds, and the smells. When suddenly, Roman soldiers are upon him. A whole company being led by a centurion. The soldiers are dragging their bruised and battered prisoner through the winding city streets.

But then the prisoner drops the cross that He is bearing. It's clear that He's too weak to go any further. And the soldiers will not stoop to pick it up. Not when you can force someone else to do your dirty work. Simon of Cyrene is simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And you don't argue with Roman soldiers. You obey. So, Simon picks up the cross, and begins to walk the Via Dolorosa: the "Way of Suffering". Simon's robe is soiled. His sandals are mired in dust. He struggles and he sweats, carrying that cross down rough city streets. And some of the bystanders weep, but others sneer. Some throw dust on their heads in grief. Others raise shouts of anger.

Finally, they reach the site of execution; Golgotha, the place of the Skull, where Simon unloads his heavy burden. The soldiers get on with the cruel business of nailing hands and feet to timber. And they wait... Death on a cross can take awhile.

And what happens to Simon of Cyrene? Does he stay and watch this agonizing ordeal... or does he simply walk away?

We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. Nor does the Bible ever speak again of Simon of Cyrene.

Though you might be interested to know that the Bible does have something to say about his family. In Mark's Gospel, Simon is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus. And Alexander and Rufus are followers of Jesus.

Which begs the question, did Simon of Cyrene become a Christian? Did the bearer of Christ's cross eventually take up his own cross and follow? Did Simon see something in this condemned man that made him choose the path of Jesus? The Bible never says, though there is evidence that Simon's 2 sons became followers of Jesus.

And I can picture them sitting at the supper table and listening to their father tell them about that trip to Jerusalem. About the Passover meal. About the glory and grandeur of the Temple. But when he talks about Friday, the boys always lean in. And listen with rapt attention as Simon tells them about the cross, he was forced to carry, and the beauty and the innocence of the man

who died upon it. "**Boys,**" He says shaking his head, "**I was simply in the wrong place, at the wrong time.**" And perhaps it was weeks, or months, or even years later that Simon eventually realizes that he was in the right place at the right time.

My prayer for you is that God gives you the strength to be in the right place at the right time; that you too, may bear the cross of Jesus.

We never know what tomorrow may bring. We never know. But God knows. God knows a coronation can become a crucifixion. God knows "**Hail Him**" on Palm Sunday can become "**Crucify Him**" on Good Friday. God knows what it is to suffer and die. God knows all about it. And God knows all about you. And that's why God does it, because God knows we need it. You and me, we need it. We need the palms and we need the passion. We need a servant and we need a savior. We need a crucifixion and we need a resurrection.

The Good News of the palms. The Good News of the passion. The Good News of the Gospel is that God loves you.

God in Christ Jesus.... Loves.... you. God loves you with a love that will never let you go.

In the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

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