

Palm Sunday – April 9, 2017, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-75, 27:1-56

“Who Do You Choose?”

How many of you, as we read “The Passion” saw something that you may not have seen before? Having to do with Barabbas, or did it just go by? Barabbas is not his name. Barabbas is his surname. If you look at the white insert that you were reading the Passion from - you will see that Pilate gave the people a choice – he said “*Do you choose Jesus Barabbas or do you choose Jesus who they call the Christ, the Messiah?*” Humanity was given a choice at that time.

Now let me explain about the surname: do you remember the Gospel account where Jesus was with the disciples at Caesarea Philippi and he asked Peter, “*Simon Barjona, who do you say that I am?*” Peter responded by saying “*You are the Messiah, the Son of God.*” Barjona means “son of Jona” so Barabbas is “son of a father.” If you ever go to Israel you will find rather quickly that children will be calling their parents “Eema” (Ima) for Mommy and Abba for their Daddy or father. Jesus will cry out Abba or Daddy – a very close relationship. That should be an “aha moment” for you. And so Barabbas is Jesus, son of a father - humanities father versus Jesus, the Son of God. Humanity – all mankind - was given a choice: God or humanity. Humanity chose itself! It chose humanity – and so God went to the cross. Jesus, the Son of God was put to death in the place of humanity – He took our place! If you don’t think God had a plan...? The prophets foretold even to the greatest detail of what was going to take place during that week; from the procession with “*Blessed is He who cometh in the Name of the Lord*” right out of Isaiah to Jeremiah and Zechariah.

I want to share with you some Holy Scripture from the Prophet Zechariah, in chapter 3 which talks about Joshua the High Priest. You are probably wondering where I am going with this on Palm Sunday, but stay with me, please - I will make it clear to you. Please look at page 1478 of your pew Bibles. What confuses me is – Joshua the High Priest? Is thought Joshua was a general that Moses put in charge and led the people across the Jordan into the Promised Land! I don’t know of any Joshua who is a High Priest, but stay with me. I want you to look at this with me - Zechariah 3:1 “*Then He, (meaning God) showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.*” Now let’s jump ahead to verse 8 of that same chapter: “*Listen, High Priest Joshua, you and your associates seated before you—who are men symbolic of things to come; I am going to bring my servant the Branch.*” Hold onto that word “Branch” if you would. Let’s move to verse 10: “*In that day each of you will invite your neighbor to sit under your vine and fig tree, declares the Lord Almighty*” You see the name Joshua means “salvation.” That’s the English translation; the Hebrew for Joshua is “Yeshua.” The Hebrew for Jesus is “Yeshua.” This is Zechariah talking about the High Priest, the TRUE High Priest, who stands before God Almighty, the Judge, and is our advocate, versus the devil who is the accuser; I hope that is another “aha” moment!

Now let’s go back and talk about a Branch. Listen to these words from the Prophet Isaiah, chapter 11:1? “*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*” Jesse was David’s father. Jesus is from the “line of David.” Remember, Jesus, Son of

David, heal me if you will, the blind man said? (in Luke Chapter 18) Jesus also said in John 15:5 *“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”* God, throughout history has been planting “bread crumbs” if you will all the way through history to show us that His Son, the Messiah is coming. Even to the point of the choice: there was a choice made in the Garden of Eden, wasn’t there? A choice to be obedient to God or to do what humanity wanted! A choice came in the courtyard that day: is it going to be Jesus, the son of humanity (Jesus Barabbas), or is it going to be Jesus the Christ, the Son of God? All of us have made choices – otherwise, why else would you be here on a Sunday morning? You are here because you have chosen Jesus, the Son of God.

I want to share with you more about this Branch and the vine. Remember, Jesus said He is the vine and we are the branches? Now, there was Jesse’s root, which came from Abraham; Jesse being David’s father. (We are connecting the ‘dots’ here!) How can we as what the Jews call ‘Goyim,’ how can we as Gentiles, be a part of that root? Well, the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 11 gives us real clarity. He says in verse 16 *“if the root is holy, the branches are too.”* He goes on: *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”* It is amazing – it is right there before us.

Now I want to share with you a symbol that was uncovered many years ago, that is a symbol of early Christendom, being “grafted in” to the family of Abraham. This is the symbol of being “grafted in.”



Palm Sunday – April 9, 2017, Year A

It starts off with the menorah on top, and the menorah joins into the Star of David (Jesse's root.) And what is joined into the Star of David? The Christian Fish – the ICHTHYS or ICHTHUS. It comes from the first Greek letters in the words “Jesus Christ Son of God – Savior” (ἰχθύς). How many here today have an ichthus on their car – the little fish symbol? My brothers and sisters, we are sons and daughters of Abraham; we are, not by birth, but by adoption. If any of you know about adoption, believe me – Marilyn and I do – we are blessed to have two children that God put in our arms - not by biological means but by His means. Some of you personally know about adoption. God called us. Do you remember – Jesus said “*you did not choose Me, but I chose you.*” (John 15:16) That is how adoption works. What the blessing is – that we have been “*grafted in*” to Yeshua, the Root. In Hebrew, the word root is called Shoresh.

I want to share with you more about this symbol; what is really cool about this is that it is all grafted together – the symbol of Romans 11:17. The Jewish symbol of the menorah – the lampstand in the Temple and Tabernacle, and then of course is the ‘star of David’; it is on the Jewish Flag – the flag of Israel. So you have got the family of Abraham – the menorah, grafted in to the family of David, and finally to the symbol of Christianity. People would draw part of the ichthus in the sand and then hopefully someone would come along and finish it. You would then know it was safe to talk about Yeshua. It all starts with the menorah and comes down from there.

This was found drawn in churches and is now part of jewelry that people wear to commemorate their being ‘grafted in.’ My keychain and Marilyn’s that we bought in Israel is just that symbol – from Romans chapter 11 verse 19. If anything else that you take from this today – you know that there was a choice to be made, and that Barabbas was not who you thought he was. I sort of think that he is the son of a different father – and that Jesus is the Son of the greatest Father of all. Today I hope you have learned that we are ‘grafted in’ and called and chosen into the family of God; to be sons and daughters of Yahweh, the Father, and that each one of us have answered the call to line up behind Jesus, the Messiah – and NOT Jesus, Barabbas.