

Palm Sunday- April 14, 2019, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: The Passion According to Luke

"True Royalty"

Today's Holy Gospel – (we do this once a year) the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ (every three years it is somebody else – this year it is Luke, last year it was Matthew and the year before it was Mark – next year it will be Mark again as we are on a three year schedule.) This Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ begins on the night before Jesus died for us. Think about all that went on leading up to this? Jesus had entered Jerusalem, (as we just remembered and celebrated) He was exalted as King before throngs of people who waved palm branches and cried "hosanna to the king!" And here we are - just four days later – Jesus is about to be arrested, tried of trumped up, false charges, was brutally tortured, and then executed – for being guilty of being God's Messiah, who came to free the world from the bondage of sin and death and its' own sins. We read through the end of chapter 23 of the Gospel of Luke to the Crucifixion – where we learn of Christ finally being recognized as a King - but recognized in mockery – with a placard, a sign above His head – on the cross declaring Him as the King of the Jews – but again it was in ridicule. Jesus is given a drink – but it is a foul, cheap, sour wine – not a drink fit for a king, instead a drink for the poor. Jesus is given a crown – but it is mockingly, and painfully – not a golden crown but it is a crown of thorns. And then His robes were divided - casting lots in mockery and jest.

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified –

- He was hung between two real criminals –
- He was killed in the cruelest of ways – nailed to a tree – which in the Old Testament was a curse.
- Jesus was even taunted by one of those criminals – who scoffed at Him saying "*Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!*"
- The other criminal recognized that Jesus was an innocent man and had done nothing wrong – and then he asked for Jesus' mercy – to be remembered when Jesus came to His kingdom.

These two criminals are a perfect example of the two ways in which people live:

- one denying Christ, making a mockery of everything that Jesus is, and what He has done;
- and the other one is seeking Him, acknowledging His Lordship, begging for mercy - asking for His forgiveness and wanting to spend all of eternity in His glorious presence.

Indeed – there are two ways to live:

- You can know peace in your life through a relationship with Jesus Christ
- Or you can live alone – without peace – and without Him!

Sin separates us from God. As sinners, we simply CANNOT come into His holy presence. God is holy – and because of our sin we cannot even approach His presence. If we have unrepentant sin in our hearts - we have put a wall between ourselves and God. BUT – we are not without hope! The Prophet Isaiah in the beginning of chapter 59 says "*See, the LORD's hand is not too*

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short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.”
(Isaiah 59:1-2)

My brothers and sisters – it is not God’s desire or His intention for anyone to be apart from Him, ever. That choice belongs to mankind! But – it is only God who can save us – only God can bridge the divide so that we can cross over to Him and be in His grace, His mercy, and His presence. The fact remains, however, is that sin has to be punished! If God left us alone, on our own devices – we would have absolutely no hope!

The reality that the price has to be paid holds true in all of our lives. The price – the cost – what we have earned - the wages of sin is death and it has to be paid – and we all know the importance of Romans 6:23 *“the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Oh Lord Jesus, PLEASE don’t let me get what I deserve!

Since what we deserve – the wages - the price - is death; the price for the covering of our sins – for reconciliation or atonement is death; that price has to be paid. Have you ever looked at the word atonement? It is three words – a compound word – “at one ment.” Atonement is you becoming one again with God – you are becoming one again with Him on a level playing field with Him – He is God but you are able to communicate with Him. At one ment with the Savior, with the Lord, and so we pray for atonement.

God promised – and the price had to be paid – and He promised a means for someone else to pay our debt – to stand in our place - and that was to shed His very own blood – for us. Many of you know me and know that one of my very favorite pericopes – sections of the Bible – is Genesis 22, when Abraham was told to travel for three days to a mountain that God would show him. Abraham, went to Mount Moriah and was leading his only son, Isaac, and he was to sacrifice him there. Abraham was being totally obedient to God. I suggest sometime during Holy Week that you read Genesis chapter 22 – Jesus is in there. The Abraham was being totally obedient to God, and was leading Isaac up to that mountain that would one day be called Mt. Zion, where the Temple would be built. Isaac was unknowingly carrying the wood for his sacrifice right on his back - and he asked his father: *“The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* Abraham said, *“God Himself will provide the lamb.”* (Genesis 22:7-8) All the way back in Genesis – God promised that He Himself would provide the lamb – He Himself – in the person of His Son – Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John reminds us that *“the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) In verse 18 of that first chapter, John continues *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.”* My brothers and sisters – God, Himself, provided the Lamb – to pay our debt – to clean our slate – the propitiation for our sins, providing a means of forgiveness and reconciliation with Him! There is nothing that you or I have done in our lives that cannot be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Get that guilt out of here. If you have given it to God – don’t let Satan remind you of it. It is done, it is finished – it was done on the cross. Tell Satan to get out of here and leave you alone – in the Name of Jesus Christ. If you do that –

he can't bother you again. He has to go, he has to leave you, at the Name of Jesus Christ – every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Tell Satan “you don't belong here!” God has already paid our debt. Ever go to a restaurant and some pays the bill for you? I remember every time Marilyn and I would go out with her parents – her father would always grab the bill. It was just his way. He wanted to cover it and just say “no it is on me.” I try to do the same thing with my kids, and hopefully they will do that same thing going forward. It is nice. We used to do something in seminary, driving through the tolls in Pennsylvania, we would pay for the next two cars behind us. Paying it forward, if you will, and the look on their faces when they found out that their bill had already been paid – they raced to try to catch up with us to say thank you. That was not why we did it – we did it to let them know that their bill has been paid – hoping they would put two and two together.

How many Sunday's have you worshipped – and seen the priest pray “He offered HIMSELF, once offered, an oblation, once offered for us, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.”

- That is why we celebrate today.
- That is why we thank Almighty God for Jesus' birth – His Incarnation.
- That is why we recall His death, Resurrection, and Ascension.
- Jesus Christ is True Royalty – He is indeed the Messiah King – the one who paid our price – and died in our place, Jesus - Himself – born once – so that we might live!

Everybody loves the baby in the manger – the Christmas songs, the presents, the star, the shepherds, the angels, the wise men – the gold, the frankincense, and the myrrh. But not everyone loves what that represents - because that is only the beginning of the story. In order for salvation to come to humanity –

- there has to be a Good Friday –
- there has to be a trial -
- there has to be a scourging,
- there has to be a crown of thorns,
- there has to be nails that painfully puncture that precious skin,
- and there has to be a cross.

There are some people who have a difficult time understanding or even believing in a Savior who convicts us as sinners, asking us to repent, turn away from our sin, and be transformed by His love. There are some people who only hear what Jesus said in the very midst of today's Gospel in Luke 23:34 "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.*" These people unfortunately go on thinking that Jesus was letting the world off the hook – because of ignorance! No, my friends, instead, Jesus was asking for forgiveness in order to give us the opportunity to make the choice for ourselves – which way we would live. Those two ways to live: with Jesus or without Jesus. The question is this:

Do we want to live:

- in sin; separated from Almighty God?

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- or forgiven – washed clean by His Holy blood – and the sacrifice that He made? The True Royalty - *“So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-20 reminds us of the person and character of Jesus who *“is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”*

In today's Epistle reading – Paul gives us deeper insight into the character and sacrifice of Jesus the Christ: *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"* (Philippians 2:6-8)

As we begin this Holy Week -I want to suggest to you to take with you today a plan and a promise:

- Plan to be about learning and worshipping the Lamb of God who took your place on the Cross;
- Plan to be about preparing to join Him when He comes again; and
- Plan to be about living the message of forgiveness and love that can only be found in Him – sharing the Good News of that message in everything we think, do and say. Please be a consistent Christian – showing and telling others what Christ, the compassionate King has done for you
- And most importantly – gratefully accept His promise of eternal life – so that you might live! The gift from True Royalty.