

***“So That You Might Live”***

The setting for today's Gospel begins on the night before Jesus died for us. This was a whirlwind week in which Jesus, entering Jerusalem, was exalted as King before throngs of people who waved palm branches and cried “hosanna to the king!” Are you aware of what hosanna means? It means “save us now!” That's what they were crying out – save us now king, take us away from this, take us away from the Roman rule! Just FOUR days later – we find the King who they exalted, laid coats down and waved palm branches, about to be arrested, tried of false charges, brutally tortured, and then executed – for being guilty of ONLY ONE THING – of being God's Messiah, who came to free us from the bondage of our own sins. We read through the end to the Crucifixion – where we learn of Christ finally being recognized as a King - but recognized in mockery.

- He is given a placard, a sign above His head – on the cross declaring Him as the King of the Jews – but again it was in ridicule.
- A royal cupbearer brings King Jesus 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 - a crown of thorns.
- Even His robes were divided - casting lots in mockery and jest.

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified –

- hung between two real criminals –
- He was killed in the cruelest of ways – being nailed to a tree!
- 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 innocent 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 second way - 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 the presence of a holy God. 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 up 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 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)*

It is not God’s desire or His intention for anyone to be apart from Him. That is not why He created us. 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. There was a song a few years back that sang about the bridge to cross the great divide, and then at the end it changes to “there is a cross to bridge the great divide.” That gap that is between mankind and their sin and God who is holy, only one thing can allow man to go across and that is the cross of Christ. If you now Jesus Christ in your heart – you speak to Him as God and friend. There is more than hope – there is salvation. His mercy and His presence is with us; we can cross over to Him and be in His presence. The fact remains 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. There is not one of us here today that has not had a debt paid for us. The price – the cost – what we have earned - the wages of sin has to be paid – and we all know the importance of Romans 6:23 *“the wages of sin(what we have earned) 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 - and that price needs to be paid. God promised a means for someone else to pay our debt – to stand in our place - and that was to shed His own blood – for us.

All the way back in Genesis 22 – God’s friend, Abraham, being totally obedient to God, was leading his only son, Isaac, up the mountain that would one day be called Mt. Zion. 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 very 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 give each one of us a clean slate – to give us forgiveness and reconciliation with Him! I want you to hear this today: **there is nothing that you have done in your life that cannot be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Repentance is complete in Him, forgiveness is complete in Him.**

Let me give you some examples: Moses was a murderer, before the burning bush ever spoke to him. He killed an Egyptian guard and then ran away as a fugitive into the desert. But God met him and transformed him into the man who would lead His people out of slavery. David –

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a lustful man – sinned. He had the husband of the woman that he lusted with, Bathsheba, he had Uriah the Hittite sent out to be at the front of the line of the army, and he was killed. David had him killed – David was a murderer! But God used Him to build His kingdom, to buy the land that Abraham took Isaac, the threshing floor of Mount Moriah, where David's son Solomon would build the Temple. If God can use those two murderers for His glory – can you imagine how He can use us? Praise God and thank Him for His mercy and love. The truth is that Jesus stretched out His arms upon the cross – and offered HIMSELF – a perfect sacrifice for the whole world” is undeniable.

- That is why we celebrate today.
- That is why we thank Almighty God for Jesus' birth.
- That is why we recall His death, Resurrection, and Ascension, along with His promise to come again!
- Jesus is indeed Christ the King – the one who paid our price – and died in our place, Jesus - Himself – born once – so that we might live!

A question came up this morning that asked “shouldn't we be wearing purple for Lent?” We have an option – to adorn the church in purple – as we will have for Thursday Night, and Wednesday night's Stations of the Cross, but we wear red. The cross is in purple, but we adorn our church, ourselves, our choir in red today – for the kingship of Christ. Red is a royal color and so we acknowledge as the people of Jerusalem did – that Jesus is the King!

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 – in order to complete the plan for salvation and bring us to Easter Sunday – 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 those horrible long 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 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. 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 blood – and the sacrifice that He made? “*So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*” (John 3:16)

Jesus asked for forgiveness – so that you might live!

You don't have to go to a confessional; you don't have to go through hoops to ask for forgiveness from Almighty God. There will come in a few minutes a time of confession. If there is stuff on your heart – give it to Him now and His forgiveness will be complete. As I am privileged to stand and offer absolution on behalf of God, to give His absolution and total forgiveness – receive that and be free today! Be free!

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians 1:15-20 reminds us of the person and character of Jesus Christ who “*is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*” In today's Epistle reading – Paul gives us deeper insight into the character and sacrifice of Jesus 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)

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as we begin this Holy Week - take with you today a plan and a promise:

- Plan your life to be about learning and worshipping the Lamb of God who took your place on the Cross;
- Plan your life to be about preparing to join Him when He comes again; and
- Plan your life to be about living the message of forgiveness and love that can only be found in Him – sharing the Gospel, 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 in your life. Each one of us has a story to tell of how God has met us where we are and has done a wonder in our lives.
- And most importantly today, on the Palm Sunday - accept His promise of eternal life – so that you might live!