

April 5, 2020 - Palm Sunday

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

OLD TESTAMENT READING: ISAIAH 50:4-9a

⁴The Lord God has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
⁵The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.
⁶I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.
⁷But the Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
⁸He who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary?
Let him come near to me.
⁹Behold, the Lord God helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

EPISTLE: PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

HOLY GOSPEL: MATTHEW 26:1-27:66

26 When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, ²"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

⁶Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. ⁸And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? ⁹For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.” ¹⁰But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

²⁰When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” ²⁵Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ ³²But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” ³³Peter answered him, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” ³⁴Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” ³⁵Peter said to him, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” ³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” ⁴⁰And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴²Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So, leaving them again,

he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him."⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him.⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

⁵⁷ Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death,⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'"⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?"⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy.⁶⁶ What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him,⁶⁸ saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean."⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean."⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man."⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed.⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

27 When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.² And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders,⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money."⁷ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers.⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And

they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel,¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

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

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

⁵⁵ There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ ⁶⁴ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, “You have a guard

of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Sermon 15 – Palm Sunday

“Bloody Glory”

John 12:20-43

Dear friends in Christ,

The Gospel lesson is not the typical one for Palm Sunday, but obviously its still appropriate. Jesus stands at the precipice of the whole reason He has come into the world. This Gospel lesson is the calm before the storm, the deep breath before the plunge, that moment of quiet seriousness that always precedes turning points, great moments in history. The story starts off with some Greeks looking, wanting to see Jesus. These Greeks are just a transitional device for John, he doesn't tell us who they are, why they want to see Jesus, or what happens to them. Philip and Andrew together go to Jesus to let him know that some Greeks are looking for Him, and Jesus, as He so often does in John, starts talking about something that seems like it is completely unrelated.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Pastor Fremer translation: This is it. Jesus is about to come to the whole point of His presence on Earth. Everything has been leading up to this: the birth, the Baptism by John in the Jordan river, starving to death in the wilderness, the miracles, the healings, the diseases cured, the resurrections, the conversions, the preaching, opposing the Pharisees, eating with tax collectors, teaching His disciples, it has all been prep-work, it's all been advertising, getting everyone ready for the main show, which is about to happen. Jesus knows this. He knows exactly what's going to happen, He's staring it in the face. Our Lord, dear friends, is ready to die for the humanity that He created.

That is Jesus' glory. Dying. When we think of glory, death is not often the first thing we think of, but that is how Jesus shows His power. He shows His power in becoming weak, vulnerable, and ultimately, being murdered. This is a reversal. When we think of power, we don't think of someone weak and killable, but that's how Jesus shows His power. He shows His power by giving up that power for us. By giving up His life for us. Saving us is God's plan. It has always been God's plan, to rescue us from our sins, and carrying out that plan is Jesus' greatest glory.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Jesus is about to die, but He's about to die to create new life. Jesus points us beyond this wretched world that we live in, at the world to come. He's telling the folks around Him, He's telling you, this life, this life isn't the point. He puts it in extreme terms, hatred, to illustrate His point. There are things more important than your world or your life. Jesus teaches us that lesson well. He didn't try to keep His life, He didn't try to save Himself. He is going to lay down His life to open the doors of heaven for all who believe in Him. Jesus takes our petty little lives that we live in this world and puts them in their place. This life? Not what's most important. What is most important is the life to come. Jesus creates that life in us when He rescues us from our sin, He gives us that life, its in all of us right now. It will be fully realized when we die and put our sin in the ground for good, but it is ours as we speak.

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Jesus knows His priorities. He knows why He's there. He's trying to tell the folks around Him that, and they don't get it. It doesn't square with their expectations. A voice thunders from heaven, the crowd is impressed, but they don't accept what He says. Jesus doesn't use the word 'lifted up' lightly. He's referring – again – to an incident from Israel's history. The Israelites in Exodus grumbled against God, complained about the conditions, so God sends fiery serpents to bite them and kill them, as they deserve. But the people repent, and God instructs Moses to take a bronze serpent, stick it on a long pole, and lift it up in front of the people. That way, when they're bitten, they won't die. Jesus uses that word, lifted up, to remind these folks of that story. To remind them of that bronze snake that saved their forefathers from death. John says it himself: "**He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.**" Jesus is saying, that snake, it saved your fathers from death. I'm going to go one better, I'm going to save you not just from death on this earth, but eternal death in hell. I'm going to save you from the very cause of death, your sin. I'm going to save you by being lifted up, killed like a criminal. The people don't like this: "**So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"** They say, wait, Jesus, the Christ is supposed to live forever. They didn't like the fact that their Messiah, their anointed one, was going to die. What kind of God dies? That's not how we expect God to behave, that ain't how they expected God to behave either. But God doesn't care about expectation, God cares about forgiving sins, and He's going to do what it takes to bring His people through their sin and into eternal life.

This reaches the thrust of what we've seen so many times, not just in the Scriptures, but all around us. John puts it so well. He writes some comments on this episode in verse 37: "**Though he had done so many**

signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

**"Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"**

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

**"He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them."**

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. Don't dismiss those last lines. Many of the authorities believed in Him, but they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. What does this mean? Well, it could go a few ways. One, they had jobs they didn't want to lose. Two, they had big egos, they didn't want to lose their jobs because they got respect. Sure. We've seen it. Jobs are important, and ego is a driving factor in all of us. Respect is hard to give up once you have it. But there's something else here, tied into Palm Sunday. Man's glory is always more impressive than God's at first glance.

They wanted Jesus to be the Messiah that they expected. They wanted Jesus to follow their lead. He wouldn't. Take heed of this, because the tendency is in you too. More than that, they could not believe because their sin led them away. Their eyes were closed, their hearts hard. No one could help them. No one. Only God can break a hard heart. Only God can open their eyes, only God can heal us from our sin.

God has to be the one working. They didn't even believe Jesus when He stood in front of them, did miracles, and preached the clear truth. That's the way we are. And if there's anything to take away from this Lent, remember that is the way YOU are, deep down. That you is still in there, it still needs to be crucified daily, it needs repentance, it needs to be fought. Never be surprised by people who don't care about Jesus. Never be

surprised when people spit on the truth. That's what humans do by nature. Thanks to Jesus, that isn't us, but that's only thanks to Jesus.

Palm Sunday. A bunch of human beings, no different than you and me, screaming, "yay, Jesus! Hooray for Jesus!" Then, a few days later, those same human beings are screaming, "crucify Him! Crucify Him!" That's the human race. Damned and inconstant, all of us. Palm Sunday. The Sunday that Jesus started to walk the road of damnation so we wouldn't have to. The Sunday that Jesus started His trip to hell to save us from the devil's jaws. The Sunday that Jesus faced it all. He faced it all, and He was thinking only of how to save humanity from itself.

Amen.