

Matthew 21.1-11 (Liturgy of the Palms)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.'

This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

'Tell the daughter of Zion,

Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying,

'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

Passion Gospel: Matthew 26.14 – 27.66

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

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 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?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

While he was sitting on the judgement 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.'

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

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.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 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!' They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.

After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 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.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, '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. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ' The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 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?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' 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. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.'

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 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!'

In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

Jesus rode through the gates into Jerusalem to shouts of 'Hosanna!'; but the Passion Gospel shows us Jesus betrayed, abandoned, and facing the inevitability of death.

His cry from the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' tears at our hearts. He cries out in solidarity with everyone who has ever suffered; a timeless cry on behalf of the millions of suffering people who have felt and ever will feel abandoned by their God and by humanity.

Maybe this will help us to remember his teachings, so we do not turn away from suffering but truly notice those who cry out as though with Jesus. Maybe remembering this will help us and our leaders to forget political infighting and the economic bottom line, and focus on the suffering of those who are already sick, or at risk of becoming sick, AND everyone who has lost their livelihood through the dramatic and necessary changes to our society.

The world has changed, and we must adapt. So many support groups have sprung up as people rally to assist healthcare workers and their neighbours;

so many quiet acts of kindness are happening; please God this spirit of selflessness and generosity will become the new normal.

The people who orchestrated Jesus' death were so preoccupied with power and fearful of change that they missed the possibility of a world in which love and compassion could become a reality. So they crucified God's son; they mocked and taunted him, rather than risk believing and being changed.

In our remembering, we must learn from the mistakes of the past so we can avoid repeating them. The crucifixion is not simply a tragic event or a necessary prelude to the resurrection. It is a reminder of the malevolence that can happen when faithful people forget to remember that we stand with the One who comes in the name of the Lord.

These past weeks we have watched in horror as coronavirus took hold of one country after another, and the rate of infection and the death toll rose every day. We don't know what is in store for us, here in Western Australia; but we know that we are much better off than people living in, for example, Syria, South Sudan, or anywhere that war and poverty mean any response to the virus will be nowhere near enough. Wherever we look- at home or overseas- there is suffering.

Jesus, on the cross, lived fully into the human experience of bearing the worst that people can inflict on one another. Betrayal, cruelty, pain and suffering: all of it happened to him.

We have a God who has lived and died; whatever we might suffer, he has already suffered; however we might die, he has endured death. He is Emmanuel, God with us.

The cross points to the resurrection; but the resurrection also points to the cross, because without the cross there is no resurrection. Hope is born when we discover that even in the lowest moments of our lives, God is with us.

The Lord be with you.