**4/2/23**

**“Hang in there with God…. It will mean a lot.”**

**Matthew 21:1-11 & Matthew 26:14--27:66**

 Praise, Honor, and Glory be to God! Amen.

What a weekend this has been so far! Friday afternoon started out with leaving work early to go to the Nursing Home. I was mentally prepping myself on what I might be walking into, but then of course God decided to throw a pretty outstanding curve ball. And all I can say is that we have an awesome God! I mean a mere half hour before I arrived at that Nursing Home I was traveling to I found out that the person I was visiting with went from being unresponsive to awake and even talkative again. I got the opportunity to visit for a little more than an hour with this person as a result. I was provided with the opportunity to listen to several old stories, be able to pray with her and for her and her family, listen to her sing church hymns, watch her even sneak in a few cat naps, and talk about the weather and the birds right outside her window. I also had some extremely important words delivered to me, and they really touched my heart. Now you might be sitting there and thinking… well what did she say? Well, those very words were, “Hang in there with God…. It will mean a lot.” Pretty good words of advice huh? What remarkable advice especially as I was preparing mentally to walk into Holy Week, and journey on towards the cross with all of you and Jesus. So, following those heart and soul filling words I went home and filled my stomach before heading out with my wife to True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center’s fourth year pre-anniversary revival. It is pretty cool to think that we have partnered in ministry in this very place with their congregation some four years ago now! The Guest Preacher of the evening, Reverend Ethel Wade, had a strong message about discipleship and teaching. Friday night then ended with me hanging out with some brothers on a video call between New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Georgia and having a few craft beers while we caught up on several things going on in our lives.

Then, we moved on to Saturday morning, and it started with some stomach pains. Thankfully they subsided after a little more rest and then enjoying coffee and a bagel following my wife not passing out during her fasting lab work. She might have been mad she did not get a Hello Kitty sticker at the lab, but she had the victory of her husband not passing out next to her too. I mean here she thought she was taking me for support, I don’t like needles either, sheesh! Following that start to the morning we headed back to this very building for day two of True Deliverance Praise & Worship Center’s fourth year celebration. We attended a prayer breakfast with the Guest Preacher, Reverend Robert Stahler. He delivered a message about how all of our small congregations in this area are mighty, and that we manage to do God’s work by walking through the proverbial gate of hell to get the job done. We claim that all too important victory despite any and all of the odds. Now, it was also pretty cool learning that he had been educated by The Reverend Jerry Falwell. I am sure many of you have heard this name before, as he was a very popular Pastor, Televangelist, and Political Activist. Now mind you, Reverend Stahler was not bragging by any means, he was just sharing some of his story, and a cool one at that. I was then shocked, and more so blessed, to be called up front to sing worship songs and pray with all the other Pastors and Worship Leaders present in this building. We then had an awesome fellowship meal with breakfast and lunch options offered, and I put that weary stomach to the test at that smorgasbord! After that we then finished off our Congregation’s Spring Newsletter and printed, folded, and stuffed it into the envelopes you will be taking home with you today. My wife and I then went our separate ways. She went off to the gym, shopping, and doing her Sunday School prep. I got dropped off at home to get caught up on some more research in the effort of writing today’s sermon. I also worked on some laundry and caught night one of the two-night spectacular called WrestleMania. As I was sitting there watching, reading, and typing something triggered my memory, and I realized something pretty cool. For a first I could actually even reread my past Sermon during my research. Now mind you our Palm Sunday Passion readings were actually from Luke last year. So, a little insight, but then again not really. Plus, it was just kind of amazing to see how my mindset and perception have shifted in just a year.

Now, we have made it to today, Sunday! Waking up to that cup of coffee, reviewing and revising my sermon, and eventually getting myself ready to head over to this church building. However, it was different! Today I got to put on the shirt and collar for the very first time as a student, as a Vicar, as a man of God continuing on my journey towards further education and eventually towards ordination. I got to put on this white robe and adorn myself just as Jesus had. This robe being the constant reminder that up here I do not act on my own authority, but instead I represent Christ. That is some heavy weight on my shoulders for sure, but I have all of you and the Lord in my heart to help me on through. So, I thank you as we continue this journey on forward together, and what a pretty cool day to mark the next steps on this journey, be it Palm Sunday and the start of Holy Week!

In studying and preparation for today, one thing that I did happen to notice, and manage to make a point of last year too, was that we got to experience two Gospel Readings on Palm Sunday! Now, last year I took an interesting focus and went after the topic by focusing on a big fight and preparations as we got ready for Holy Week. This year I am going to take us down a little different path. So, bear with me here.

Now, as familiar as both those readings from Matthew were to us today, just perhaps like that of singing a common hymn or even reciting a common prayer, I want to encourage you to not just go through the motions and overlook things. I want to caution you on the danger of doing so, and I am going to promote that you grasp things in a way that will allow you to continue to question and even be amazed by our faith and the stories that we are continually offered.

As we dive in and explore things today the very first point or question I want to pose to you is how in the world does Jesus ride into town on a donkey and a colt? Yes… I mean on two different animals! Did you ever really stop and think about that, or did you just kind of minimize your thought on that and move onto the next part of the story? That is definitely something so small in our stories today, but yet so easy to overlook. Well, not by me and not today. So, maybe I am giving you something to ponder over lunch out with some friends or family later, or maybe I am giving you a reason to pick up that Bible at home and check things out a little deeper. I mean if you really think about it Jesus did not just ask for one mode of transportation! Just maybe he realized it is always good to have a spare or able bodied animal to ensure the travel accommodations would be met without issue. Maybe, just maybe, the masses were unable to see his Father sitting on the other animal riding into town next to his son while providing a pep talk to build him up for the hard journey ahead despite all the cheer and praise he was receiving at that very moment. Maybe the father was there alongside his son reassuring him that he could fulfill his will as it was written. That is the really cool part about our stories, and our faith. We can explore and ponder things much more deeply! However, we have to remind ourselves, and even allow ourselves, to slow down and be fascinated in the awe and glory of it all.

Alright, one story and different mindset in the books there, and one aspect of it that hopefully has you rethinking things a bit. Now, we move on and get another awkward atmosphere in the mix today. We get to experience the almost immediate switch in position of the masses. At one moment people are hailing Jesus with praise and love, and they want him around helping and healing them. Then, just a few days later, almost practically within the blink of an eye, they are calling for his death. How exactly do you go from wanting to be around a man and experience his presence and love to wanting to get rid of or discard him like he is some common piece of trash? I mean the people even went to the extent of turning him over to the authorities while chanting and demanding the release of a career criminal in favor of having the opportunity of wiping the slate clean and getting our Lord and Savior back! It was not like they had anything to be mad at him for, or even despise him for… or did they? Did they live in a society very similar to ours today? Did they feel that since he did not do things in the time or way that they wanted they felt they could just simply discard him and move on to the next so-called great thing or person? Did the masses feel that he was so different and so awkward that there was something wrong with him, and that he did not need to be around any longer for fear that they might catch something? Well, there is another lunch time discussion for you to possibly have, or another thing to dive deep into your Bibles and get more perspective of. That love and hate switch that occurred so wildly fast and led to multiple calls for his crucifixion still has me shaking my head.

How about one more awkward occurrence here? I know, I know, I see you stirring in your pews. Well, I would be remiss in my duties if I did not share one more thing I found particularly odd. Let’s see if you even caught it before, or if you have ever even kind of blinked an eye at it. We get this earthquake right? The tombs of Jerusalem’s dead have been opened. They are no longer sleeping, and they will be raised following the resurrection. I mean we are talking about something like this happening before the resurrection even takes place. We are talking about these folks appearing to people when their tombs were opened. Talk about some kind of power over death and the grave, and talk about some kind of foreshadowing. I think the other two stories about the colt and donkey, as well as the quick love and hate turn are easier to imagine in some sort of way or context. However, this might not be so easy. Well, there has always got to be a little more challenging of an assignment to be offered, or that so-called extra credit. So, you overachievers out there got something extra here too, and that is awesome, because we are always supposed to have a constant hunger and willingness to explore our faith. So, explore and discuss on!

Now, I want to leave you with this pretty cool part of Tim Zingale’s sermon titled “Jesus The Humble King.” … “Jesus understood all the different thoughts that people had about him. Palm Sunday is the day when, knowing that people are fickle, get tired of parades and go home, Jesus came riding. It is a day when, knowing that religious leaders like things neat and tidy and kill reformers, Jesus came riding. It is a day when, knowing that the humble truth teller is walked upon, knowing that people will sell their souls for a handful of silver, knowing that even good friends will sleep while we suffer, it is a day when knowing all this, Jesus came riding.” (3) “Jesus came riding because he knew that all of us needed to have Him ride into our lives as the Messiah – the king who would save us from the power of hell through his resurrection on Easter Sunday.” (3) And in the words imparted on me at that Nursing Home visit that started out this wild weekend, remember, “Hang in there with God…. It will mean a lot.”

Amen.

**References**

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 Sunday, April 2, 2023

 Sunday of the Passion / Palm Sunday

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(3) SermonCentral.com

 Jesus The Humble King

 Contributed by Tim Zingale on Jun 7, 2002

 Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11, Philippians 2:5-11

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Processional Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11**

Jesus enters Jerusalem

1When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying 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. 3If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” 4This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

 5“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.”

6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9The 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!”

10When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” 11The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Matthew 26:14--27:66**

In fulfillment of scripture and obedience to God’s will, Jesus goes to the cross so that a new covenant in his blood may bring forgiveness of sins. Even the soldiers who crucify him recognize him to be the Son of God.

14One of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

 17On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations 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 near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’ ” 19So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

 20When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; 21and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” 22And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” 23He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” 25Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

 26While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from 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 never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

 30When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

 31Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters 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 ahead of you to Galilee.” 33Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” 34Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” 35Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

 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.” 37He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.” 39And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” 40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” 43Again 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. 45Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

 47While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. 50Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?” 55At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

 57Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. 59Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’ ” 62The high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” 63But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” 64Jesus 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.”

65Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66What is your verdict?” They answered, “He deserves death.” 67Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, 68saying, “Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?”

 69Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” 71When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” 73After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” 74Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment the cock crowed. 75Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

 27:1When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. 2They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

 3When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” 5Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. 6But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” 7After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. 8For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, 10and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

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

 15Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17So 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?” 18For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. 19While he was sitting on the judgment 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.” 20Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” 22Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!” 23Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

 24So 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.” 25Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

 27Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and 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!” 30They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

 32As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

 38Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40and 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.” 41In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42“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. 43He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’ ” 44The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

 45From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46And 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?” 47When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” 48At 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. 49But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54Now 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!”

 55Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

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

 62The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ 64Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” 65Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” 66So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.