**3/24/24**

**Palm Sunday**

**Mark 11:1-11 & Mark 14:1--15:47**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning to each and every one of you out there today. I am glad that you all have joined us on day one of Holy Week. I encourage you to check the announcements section of the bulletin and join us and other congregations throughout the week as we continue on with this Lenten Journey. Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter are right around the corner.

Now, today I had quite a quandary on my hands. I mean you all got to hear two different Gospel Readings, and the second one was a doozy for sure. I was blessed to have several people offer to split the reading with me, and my wife was the first to make that offer. And since I did not have to read everything, I seriously debated preparing two Sermons instead. But…. I was quick to nix that idea, as I am sure many of you just had a sigh of relief there. However, I am going to encourage all of you that are here and at home to stand up and stretch. Let’s get our body and minds in line to hear more about our Gospel Readings we heard earlier today. Alright, all stretched out now?

I must say it was very hard to find a way to best summarize things here this morning. With that being said, I am going to respectively try and do so by diving right in. Are you ready?

First off, we had this thing called the Processional Gospel. You know where we are supposed to march in carrying palm branches symbolizing Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. Mind you Jesus did not ask for this kind of entry, and he especially did not ask people to throw their cloaks or these palms on the ground in front of him. However, this man was getting a rather Kingly entrance as he entered into the city. The people thought this King was going to be the one to carry them towards victory in war over the Romans, and not be a King who ended up submitting and laying down his life as the sacrificial lamb. They knew the scriptures as they were out their chanting their hosannas and talking amongst one another, but they seemed to miss some vital pieces of the story, or for that fact be accepting of the entire story. We are also quickly reminded that “Being a disciple of Jesus doesn’t enable us to immediately “get it.” Following Jesus is a life of learning.” (3)

Our Second Gospel Reading of the day takes an immediate turn. We hear right off the bat how the priests and scribes are trying to arrest and kill Jesus, but they had to try and do so in a manner that might not cause an issue due to the festival. Now wait a minute, weren’t we just praising Jesus to start out our morning here together and giving him a King’s entry? How does our story turn so quickly? It seems we go from love to hate in 2.3 seconds. However, isn’t that how the world works at times? We go from admiration and respect to jealousy and frustration almost immediately. However, that happens way more often than not in many situations in life, and that is whether you or I are willing to admit that either. Despite all of this we are reminded that “Throughout this week we will continue to see the depth, steadfastness and power of Jesus’ love. His love for people drives him in to conflict with the greedy and corrupt. His love for the world drives him to the cross. His love does more than confront—it overcomes.” (3)

Alright back to our summary of events here. We get this woman with a jar of alabaster who decides to anoint Jesus. Why in the world would she not sell that and raise money to help the poor is the question of the hour, but Jesus is quick to remind them the poor will always be with us and need our support. However, he is with them now and she is actually anointing him before his death. Now, did they want to hear or accept that? Probably not!

Next, Judas breaks onto the scene, and we learn of his purpose in this story of events. However, we quickly transition to the disciples locating a place for the Passover meal. As they were eating, they were informed of the one who would betray Jesus. However, he was not blatantly pointed out, and was just described as one dipping bread in the bowl with him. The marked statement here is from the tail end of verse 21 in chapter 14, “It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” (2) Well, talk about a strong statement and conviction right there! We then transition back into the main focus of the meal, and Jesus reminding them how to eat and drink as they commune together moving forward following this example set for them at the Last Supper. This is indeed where we get The Words of Institution that we are all too familiar with in our Eucharistic Prayer.

Now, as we move along a little further, we get the confirmation we all fear and fail to recognize. As we all manage to play a role similar to Peter in this story. We fear to admit that we will all will deny Christ a time or two, or three for that fact, in our lifetimes. But, mind you this was only Jesus foreshadowing this occurrence, we have to wait for the story to unravel a little more. Then, the story moves on and Jesus takes three of his right-hand men with him as he separates himself from others in an effort to deal with the stress of the coming hour and goes and prays. Now, for some awkward reason all these men could do was find a time to sleep. Was it because of their denial of what was to come? Was it because they were just simply tired from following along with Jesus and conducting ministry alongside of him? Or was it because they were being protected in a way that you and I will never begin to imagine or know? No matter what the correct answer might be, they could not stop time, and the betrayer and the time had arrived. The kiss and the ultimate betrayal was going to occur. This is exactly when many of us could yell out during the course of the very story, how could you Judas?!?! In a final attempt to protect Jesus we hear of the sword being drawn and an ear of one of the guards being cut off. Jesus questions this action and he even questions why they did not arrest him sooner. But he knows full and well this was not in the scriptures. Then, this is also where we learn of everyone actually deserting him.

We now move on to all these officials and elders assembling and trying to find due cause for conviction of Jesus. The one time you think they could have gotten all of their stories straight was exactly the time that they could not! If this would have been a true court of law then Jesus would have never been convicted! There were way too many conflicting stories here, and for that fact several unbelievable ones as well. Their stories were so far-fetched that Jesus let them spin on and provided no feedback until he was asked to confirm his identity. We then learn that this was the very point that they had found to convict him of. They disrespected him and mocked him, and the story continued on. As we close out the first of the two chapters of our main Gospel Reading today, we hear of the exact ways Peter denied knowing Jesus. We learn that despite being there as a witness to the events, and being on the road with this man throughout his earthly ministry, Peter was still human and feared for his very own life. The three denials came and the cock crowed twice just as Jesus had foreshadowed to earlier, and we hear that once Peter realized what he had done he had broken down and wept. What a completely normal reaction that we all admittedly have done several times in our lives as well.

Alright, scene one break! It is time for intermission here. Go ahead and head out to the narthex and use this time to utilize the facilities, and make sure you wash your hands. Then, go ahead and grab some snacks from the Fellowship Hall, because we know Kathy has some bread, fruit, and goodies out there from her Saturday run and deliveries. After all of that make sure you come back here for scene two, and the very conclusion of our story for today. Sit down Leon! I was just kidding!

As we begin scene two here after that short break, we learn that the real-life actors did not really regroup or recompose themselves very well. Instead, they continued on with this effort to convict Jesus, and they handed him off to Pilate. Of course, they were not willing to take Jesus’ execution solely on their own shoulders. So, why not get other officials involved too? However, what they did not expect was that Pilate would find nothing against Jesus when interviewing him. They did not further expect him to be willing to release him and follow along with their custom of the time. So, instead they were willing to have a career criminal be released over the man that could release them of all their iniquities and sins. The crowd was even so misguided that they shouted for Jesus’ crucifixion. The man of the hour just a few short days ago was now the man of disdain. Talk about a quick change in events! We learn and know that, “The pomp and praise of Palm Sunday was never his end goal. His focus was directed completely on Golgotha. Jesus’ end game was the cross and grave. In order to heal our brokenness, he had to become completely shattered. God’s healing balm for the world could only come through the One who descended more and more into our fractured human frailty.” (4) Thank goodness for us he was willing to do that, and he never lost sight on the end goal in the process like many of us would have done, I am sure.

Now, I urge you to continue to move along here with me and this story. I mean of course we know the rest of this story. We often shake our heads, and have heavy feelings of remorse and shame. The man that we call Jesus would be mocked by the guards, they would even need to get a passer-by to help him carry the cross because of how badly they injured our Lord. When Jesus was offered a drink to help him handle the pain just a little bit he quickly declined it. As they crucified him, they would roll those all so famous dice, and they would cast lots for his clothing. Now, why in the world was this man’s clothing so important? Money, fame, or perhaps bragging rights? Those guards know why, and so do you and I.

So, at Nine o’clock in the morning when Jesus is hanging on the cross with the one and only charge, they could somehow pin against him hanging above his head, “The King of the Jews.” As if he did not experience enough mocking and being scourged leading up to this humiliating moment, he even got a little more from the people that passed by, and to top it all off the criminals that hung on crosses to his right and left had to add their two cents in as well. As the day progressed on Jesus’ human form grew weak as it hung on the cross. His mind also grew weak and he spoke to his father one last time ensuring that this indeed was what had to happen. He knew the answer, but he wanted to be certain, and he needed those around to be certain as well. This is then where he breathed his last and that curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This is where one of the guards verified everything and summed things up so profoundly in his confirming statement from verse 39 in chapter 15, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (2)

To end of our story today we learn that those standing around wanted to respect Jesus’ body, and more importantly they wanted to respect their customs. We learn here that one of Jesus’ followers boldly, yes, the Bible says boldly, asked Pilate for his body. However, we see one last doubt coming in from Pilate, and him actually questioning if Jesus was even dead. When it was indeed confirmed by the guard then Joseph of Arimathea went to work. Jesus was taken down, wrapped in linen cloth, and laid in the tomb with the stone rolled against the entrance. We even hear that as a sign of confirmation of this both Mary’s were present as witnesses. We learn that “Their presence within eyesight of the cross and again at the tomb, where his body is laid, offers silent testimony to all that Jesus did and taught during his earthly ministry. Just as they supported him through that ministry, they now offer a ministry of their presence.” (5)

There you have it! Both Gospel Readings from today summarized the best that I could. I of course did a little reading and studying in preparation for this. However, just like we all know the story we also come to recognize that there are indeed differing accounts in the four gospels, and I wanted to make sure I did not overlap details from the other gospel writers. Let me tell you something, this was much easier said than done for sure. The best part of this story though is that we know this indeed is not the end! This is why I encouraged you earlier, and will encourage you yet again, to continue on through these last few days of Lent and have that hunger for more and more knowledge and experience as you gather together with others for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the most awesome of all stories and occurrences that we get to proclaim on Easter Morning. Don’t grow weary along the way, Jesus didn’t! He knew his mission and purpose, but you do not have to live it out as he has already done everything for us. We are no longer bound by sin because he heeded that very call and responsibility! Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

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 March 24th, 2024

 Sunday of the Passion

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 Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday) Year B

 Verbal threads connect Jesus’ death to his baptism

 March 24, 2024

 Commentary on Mark 15:1-39 [40-47]

 Audrey West

**PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL**

 **Mark 11:1-11**

 1When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the

 Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples 2and said to them, “Go into the

 village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a

 colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. 3If anyone says to you, ‘Why

 are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here

 immediately.’ ” 4They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the

 street. As they were untying it, 5some of the bystanders said to them, “What are

 you doing, untying the colt?” 6They told them what Jesus had said; and they

 allowed them to take it. 7Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their

 cloaks on it; and he sat on it. 8Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and

 others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9Then those who

 went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

  “Hosanna!

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

   10Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

  Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

 11Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked

 around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the

 twelve.

 **Mark 14:1--15:47**

 The passion story in Mark’s gospel presents Jesus as one who dies abandoned

 by all. He shows himself to be the true Son of God by giving his life for those who

 have forsaken him.

 1It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The

 chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and

 kill him; 2for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the

 people.”

 3While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table,

 a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she

 broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. 4But some were there

 who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way?

 5For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and

 the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. 6But Jesus said, “Let her

 alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. 7For

 you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them

 whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. 8She has done what she

 could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. 9Truly I tell you,

 wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will

 be told in remembrance of her.”

 10Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in

 order to betray him to them. 11When they heard it, they were greatly pleased,

 and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to

 betray him.

 12On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed,

 his disciples said to him, “Where do you want us to go and make the preparations

 for you to eat the Passover?” 13So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them,

 “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him,

 14and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks,

 Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15He

 will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for

 us there.” 16So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as

 he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

 17When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18And when they had taken

 their places and were eating, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray

 me, one who is eating with me.” 19They began to be distressed and to say to him

 one after another, “Surely, not I?” 20He said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one

 who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21For the 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.”

 22While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke

 it, gave it to them, and said, “Take; this is my body.” 23Then he took a cup, and

 after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24He said to

 them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25Truly I

 tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it

 new in the kingdom of God.”

 26When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27And

 Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written,

  ‘I will strike the shepherd,

   and the sheep will be scattered.’

 28But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” 29Peter said to him,

 “Even though all become deserters, I will not.” 30Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell

 you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three

 times.” 31But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not

 deny you.” And all of them said the same.

 32They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here

 while I pray.” 33He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be

 distressed and agitated. 34And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to

 death; remain here, and keep awake.” 35And going a little farther, he threw

 himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass

 from him. 36He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this

 cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” 37He came and found

 them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep

 awake one hour? 38Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of

 trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39And again he went away

 and prayed, saying the same words. 40And once more he came and found them

 sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to

 him. 41He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking

 your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the

 hands of sinners. 42Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

 43Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and

 with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the

 scribes, and the elders. 44Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The

 one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45So when

 he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46Then

 they laid hands on him and arrested him. 47But one of those who stood near

 drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48Then

 Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as

 though I were a bandit? 49Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching,

 and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” 50All of them

 deserted him and fled.

 51A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They

 caught hold of him, 52but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

 53They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the

 scribes were assembled. 54Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the

 courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself

 at the fire. 55Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for

 testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. 56For many

 gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. 57Some

 stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58“We heard him say, ‘I

 will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build

 another, not made with hands.’ ” 59But even on this point their testimony did not

 agree. 60Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you

 no answer? What is it that they testify against you?” 61But he was silent and did

 not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of

 the Blessed One?” 62Jesus said, “I am; and

  ‘you will see the Son of Man

  seated at the right hand of the Power,’

  and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’ ”

 63Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need

 witnesses? 64You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them

 condemned him as deserving death. 65Some began to spit on him, to blindfold

 him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” The guards also took him over

 and beat him.

 66While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high

 priest came by. 67When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and

 said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” 68But he denied it,

 saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went

 out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. 69And the servant-girl, on seeing

 him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” 70But

 again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter,

 “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” 71But he began to curse,

 and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” 72At that

 moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that

 Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three

 times.” And he broke down and wept.

 15:1As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the

 elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and

 handed him over to Pilate. 2Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He

 answered him, “You say so.” 3Then the chief priests accused him of many things.

 4Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they

 bring against you.” 5But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

 6Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom

 they asked. 7Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had

 committed murder during the insurrection. 8So the crowd came and began to ask

 Pilate to do for them according to his custom. 9Then he answered them, “Do you

 want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” 10For he realized that it was

 out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. 11But the chief priests

 stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. 12Pilate

 spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the

 King of the Jews?” 13They shouted back, “Crucify him!” 14Pilate asked them,

 “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” 15So

 Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after

 flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

 16Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the

 governor’s headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. 17And they

 clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they

 put it on him. 18And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” 19They

 struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him.

 20After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own

 clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

 21They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his

 cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22Then they

 brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).

 23And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24And they

 crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what

 each should take.

 25It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26The inscription of

 the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews.” 27And with him they

 crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. 29Those who passed

 by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy

 the temple and build it in three days, 30save yourself, and come down from the

 cross!” 31In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also

 mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save

 himself. 32Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so

 that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted

 him.

 33When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the

 afternoon. 34At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema

 sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

 35When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for

 Elijah.” 36And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and

 gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take

 him down.” 37Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38And the

 curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39Now when the

 centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he

 said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

 40There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary

 Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and

 Salome. 41These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in

 Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to

 Jerusalem.

 42When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the

 day before the sabbath, 43Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the

 council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went

 boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44Then Pilate wondered if he

 were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had

 been dead for some time. 45When he learned from the centurion that he was

 dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and

 taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had

 been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

 47Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.