

The Last Supper
Mark 14:1-25

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

I would assume that this will not be the first time that you have heard the readings about Palm Sunday, and the passion story. I only read to you a portion of the entire Gospel story, but I am sure you have heard about what happened, the last supper, the prayers in the garden, the arrest, the betrayal and the denial, the call to crucify. Many times when we hear of the story we think of the injustice and the tragedy of an innocent man dying, but overlook the actual violence that lies behind the Gospel account. They shouted, "Crucify Him", Crucify Him". The Mob called for his death, screaming for blood, death, pain and violence. The Gospel of Mark really spares us the details, it sort of skim over the horrors that this man faced when he was beaten to a pulp, whipped with leather and pieces of bones until muscles and bones were exposed, this man who was mocked, spat on, a crown of thorns shoved on, shoved into his head until he bleed from the thorns, His hands and feet nailed to wood, his side pierced with a spear, and left hanging bleeding, suffocating in utter agony, too weak to even lift himself up to take another breath. The violence of the cross wasn't something short and swift, it went on for hours. It was violence, it was cruel, it was suffering, it was death.

But the events leading up to that black Friday were anything but violent. Today Palm Sunday we heard of the magnificent occasion when Jesus entered Jerusalem. Jesus riding triumphant into the city of Jerusalem, as if coming down the red carpet, people spread palm branches and cloaks on the street in front of him and the crowds shouted "Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord".

Perhaps Palm Sunday didn't make much of an impact on the entire city of Jerusalem. These were festival days. Jerusalem was crowded. During the Passover it became a large city with the addition of pilgrims and worshippers even as it does on the holy days and special occasions these days. Perhaps this crowd wouldn't have even made the evening news, there were no cameras there to record it and shoot it out instantaneously for all the world to hear it.

But those people that were in that crowd, who laid down the palms or their coats before the riding Messiah knew that something special was happening. Someone special was entering their city. And so they shouted "Hosanna". Amid all the happiness, cheering, and waving of palm branches there was only one who knew that this week would end in violence. The one who rode the young colt was fully aware that the crowds would yell, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him." In just a few

days he would experience the pain and cruelty reserved only for the worst and most hardened criminals, the cross.

As he stood at that table and held the bread and said this is my body. As he stood looking into the eyes of the men who would betray him, deny him, run away from him, even as he said this cup is the new covenant of my blood shed for you and for all people. Even when he stood before the Jewish Council, was beaten and mocked by the soldiers and then nailed horribly to the rough wooden cross outside Jerusalem. Even when he went through all that Jesus knew he was dying to save the people who betrayed him, denied him, rejected him, ran away from him, the same people who beat him, and nailed him to that cross. God loved us so much, that he sent his own son, to take upon himself all the sins, the hatred, the beatings. God loved us so much that the Word became flesh, became man and lived among us going to the cross to die for us. Remember the words of our second reading...”who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness...and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He had it all, but we didn't, we didn't have freedom from our sins, and so He gave up it all so that we could be freed. So that I could be saved. So that you could be saved. The horrors of this reading we are about to walk through in this week ahead has all been done for us. So that the blood of the covenant can be poured out for all people, that includes you and me. Jesus faces these horrors of betrayal, suffering, death, for each one of us.

The great artist Rembrandt, had a tendency to paint his own image into background crowd scenes of many of his paintings. When he came to paint the scene of the crucifixion, he likewise felt compelled to paint his own face on one of those people in mob. He believed and knew that it was for his sins that Jesus was nailed to the tree. It can be easily said that Rembrandt could have painted every one of our faces in the crowd that day as they called for Jesus death, not just any death, but the worst kind of death imaginable. There was nothing sweet and gentle about the crowd that called for Jesus death – they called for the violent and excruciating death on a cross.

Rembrandt was right, we were in those crowds. We could easily been one of the mob shouting “Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest Heaven”. We can easily be the ones filled with hope, and praise, seeking the coming of the Lord. But we also could just as easily be the ones there in the mob on that Friday, yelling just as loud Crucify, Crucify. It was your sin and my sin that crucified Jesus. When we look at the figure stretched out on the cross, or read the story of Jesus' death in the Gospel accounts we need to remember that it is for us because of us, it is *our* sin that is being paid for. Through that punishment of sinfulness, that violence, the suffering and death of Jesus, through all that our

peace was being made with God, we were reconciled with God. That is the Love of God, through one man's blood shed for you are you saved.

In 1927 a man named Asibi, a West African native, was stricken with the deadly disease, yellow fever. Not many people survived this dreaded disease. However, Asibi lived. It seems that his body had conquered the disease. Asibi's blood contained the antibodies from which to begin to develop a successful vaccine. In the years to follow doctors and drug companies developed an efficient vaccine against yellow fever, and their work has saved the lives of untold numbers of people around the world. Each dose of vaccine, though, can be traced back to one original blood sample, one donor who gave of some of his blood so a cure can be found – that blood of Asibi. You might say that one man's blood saved the lives of millions of people.

The blood of Christ, the sacrifice of one man, has saved billions upon billions not just from a sickness that needs a vaccine, but from sin and death itself that calls for a price to be paid to redeem us and save us. Christ gives us his life so that we may have this new life. A life eternal in the Lord's kingdom, where there is no more suffering and tears, no more pain and sorrow. As we enter into this Holy Week let us think of the punishment and pain, the betrayals and death that Jesus took upon himself so that we might have hope and assurance. Recall the love that Christ had for you as he faced this terrible crucifixion. And give thanks and give God our praise for the gift of this great sacrifice of love. Let us always remember the price that was paid for our souls. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.