



SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

PALM SUNDAY

Procession with Palms

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL: Matthew 21:1-11

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL *Bethphage = BETH-fuh-juh*

The richest reading of this little story will distinguish between the voices of Jesus, the prophet, and the crowds. Those subtle distinctions require forethought and adequate rehearsal time. Invest in both. Let this account of our Lord's grand entrance be a festive prelude to the later reading of the passion.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a

A reading from Isaiah.

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens—
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like 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 are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.

⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?

The word of the Lord. *or* Word of God, word of life.

PSALMODY: Psalm 31:9–16

FIRST READING *Isaiah = eye-ZAY-uh*

One might be helped to think about this reading as a poem. Be sensitive to the images painted in these verses and help the hearer to see them. The congregation is intended to hear in these words the voice of Jesus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem and his impending passion. Verse 8 is of particular interest and provides a particular challenge. The speaker asks a question in two different ways. They are rhetorical questions, though, so don't raise your pitch at the end of them. And be certain to provide an adequate pause between "together" and the next question so that the hearer can follow the dialogue.

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:5-11

A reading from Philippians.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death —
even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

The word of the Lord. *or* Word of God, word of life.

SECOND READING *Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-unz*

This text is widely known. That can be both a blessing and a bane. Do not approach the reading task casually. Live with the text a little this week and allow it to address you. The author attempts to describe the mind of Christ in verses 6 and 7. He describes the Father's rewarding of the Son in verses 9–11. But the topic sentence is verse 5, where he urges both the reader and the hearer to "let the same mind be in you." Bring appropriate urgency to this holy instruction.

GOSPEL: Matthew 26:14—27:66

OR MATTHEW 27:11-54, following on p. 111

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

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, ▶

GOSPEL *Iscariot = is-CAR-ee-ut Gethsemane = geth-SEM-uh-nee Zebedee = ZEB-uh-dee Caiaphas = KAY-uh-fus prophesy = PROF-uh-sy Jeremiah = jehr-uh-MY-uh Barabbas = buh-RAB-us Cyrene = sy-REE-nuh Eli, lema sabachthani = EL-ee LEM-uh suh-BAHK-thun-ee Arimathea = ar-ih-muh-THEE-uh*
Sadly, a significant segment of the assembly will be exposed to the passion account only once this year. That may be the best argument for reading Matthew’s telling in its entirety. If this once is to be the best it can be, the reader will want to be devotionally steeped in the story and have read it aloud any number of times in advance. Practice makes the difference between passable and persuasive. Consider the merit of a substantial pause (and even bowing deeply at the reading desk) following 27:50, when Jesus “breathed his last.”

“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,
“Prophecy 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.

^{27:1}When 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

OR: Matthew 27:11-54

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

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,
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¹³Then Pilate said to him,

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¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge,
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the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd,
anyone whom they wanted.

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¹⁸For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

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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;

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were mocking him, saying,

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