

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Sunday next before Easter,
commonly called Palm Sunday¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirteenth Verse of the fifty-second Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; be-

cause he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

“Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew.⁴

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified. Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas [**KYE-uh-fuss**], And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for

my burial. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

“Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith [SETH], My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then saith [SETH] Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him,

Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith [SETH] unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith [SETH] he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith [SETH] unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith [SETH] unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

“And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus and took him. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest’s, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into

⁴ St. Matthew 26:1-end (KJV).

⁵ Genesis 14:18.

⁶ *Sister Magdalen, Friends of Mt. Athos Annual Report* 50 (2001).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bishop Ordinary, the Diocese of the Holy Cross; Rector, the Cathedral Church of the Epiphany, Columbia, SC.

God's answer to his bewilderment was "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not." This is a "saving spiritual formula in an epoch where both pride and despair reign supreme."⁶

This Holy Week we will plumb the depths with our Lord. During this Holy Week we must "not allow anything, from within or without, to smother gratitude towards God's providence. Whatever happens, do not despair. Everything is possible to God, who is with us always, even when we descend to the valley of the shadow of death."⁷ "Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not." We know this from Psalm 139, "If I go down to hell, thou art there also...[,] if I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to thee are both alike."

Descend to the lowest place, which the demons cannot do. They are always puffing themselves up. When you descend to the lowest place you are flying under their radar. They have no mental category for self-emptying and sacrifice. There, in the lowest place, the Holy Spirit shows us that Jesus is the Truth about ourselves. Jesus is the Truth of every situation. Through Him, in the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem and all creation, your heart and mine, can be returned to the Father.

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The Rt. Rev'd Paul C. Hewett, SSC⁸
April 1, 2012

¹ This sermon was originally written on the propers for Holy Communion on Palm Sunday, 2012.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 36 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxviii (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxvi (CIPBC 1963).

³ Isaiah 52:13—53:12 (KJV).

his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

"And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas [**KYE-uh-fuss**], the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

"Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was

also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the center of gravity of all time and space. It is the bellybutton of the cosmos. Four thousand years ago, after Abraham defeated his enemies, Melchizedek [**mell-KIZZ-uh-deck**], King of Salem, brought out bread and wine and a blessing for Abraham. Melchizedek [**mell-KIZZ-uh-deck**] was priest of God Most High and King of Salem, King of Shalom, King of Peace, the mysterious foreshadowing and type of Christ.⁵ The name Jerusalem is “Jeru-Shalom,” Foundation of Peace.

Jerusalem is the jewel box of the Son of God. It is His City. Heaven itself is called the New Jerusalem, the Bride adorned for her husband, the Mother of us all. Jesus is the reigning Monarch of the universe, from Jerusalem outwards. On Palm Sunday, He goes forth as a Bridegroom out of His chamber, rejoicing as a giant to run His course. His course will take Him to Pilate’s judgment hall. It will be shown there that Jesus is the One in charge; He is on the offensive; He defines the issues; He is the judge over Pilate. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work to see that Jesus is the Judge of every relationship, every conversation, every decision, every person’s life, every nation’s life.

The royal procession of our King will lead to His Throne, the strangest throne in the world, a cross, on a hill, in

the garbage dump outside the City, where criminals are executed. The Royal Procession which begins on Palm Sunday goes to the Upper Room and to Calvary and the Empty Tomb and the Great Forty Days and to the Holy of Holies in Heaven.

This is the ultimate, cosmic reconnaissance mission. During the wilderness sojourn of the people of Israel, Moses sent twelve spies to reconnoiter the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb came back with a positive report. Joshua—Yeshua—Jesus, is now completing the ultimate, cosmic reconnaissance mission. He will plumb the depths, for us. He will harrow hell.

When a road surface becomes too worn, it has to be scraped to its foundation before it is repaved. When you scramble eggs you are left with a pan that has to be soaked, scraped and scoured. Jesus’ Royal Procession brings Him to the place, to the bellybutton of the universe, to the center of gravity, the center of all time and space, to the new axis of the new creation. There He will identify with and connect with all the sin and filth of the world, and scrape it out, from the bottom up.

He will plumb the depths. He will harrow hell. He does this for each one of us. Everyman’s heart is Jerusalem. Everyman’s heart is a jewel box for the Son of God. Everyman here is set for forgiving, cleansing, healing, renewing, and citizenship in the New Jerusalem, built from the rubble of the old. We have a saying, “Let’s get to the bottom of this.” Jesus is doing that with you right now. He is descending to the bottom of your barrel, the innermost recesses of your heart, the ultimate truth about yourself. There, within you, He is laying the foundation of Peace, the Jeru-Shalom.

Seventy years ago, a monk of Mt. Athos, St. Silouan, was given the grace to get to the bottom of his own heart, to plumb the depths, to go “re-con,” to be a spiritual Navy Seal. For six months he endured a violent inner storm. He weathered that, to enter paschal joy. Then came a period of bewilderment.