

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER¹
The Sunday next before Easter, commonly called
Palm Sunday

Lessons:

The First Lesson:² Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the ninth Chapter of Zechariah.³

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**], and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson:⁴ Here beginneth the twenty-seventh Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew.⁵

“When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver

Prayer.” *Concerning the Service of the Church*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER viii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

⁵ St. Matthew 27:1-54 (KJV).

⁶ The Roman legionaries carried vinegar and water in their canteens, so this drink was probably out of one of them. This also fulfills Psalm 69:21.

⁷ *I.e.*, for Elijah, whom the Jews believed would return to be their savior as seemed to have been prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6.

⁸ St. Matthew 27:28-30 (KJV).

⁹ St. Matthew 27:43 (KJV).

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pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me. And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas [*buh-RABB-uss*]. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas [*buh-ROBB-uss*], or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

“When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas [*buh-ROBB-uss*], and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas [*buh-ROBB-uss*]. Pilate saith [*SETH*] unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

“When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this

to temptation. Instead He taught us how to live, how to love, and how to serve God.

He had no sin, and yet He was willing to love us enough to protect us from the fury of the wrath of the Father for the sins we have committed. He was, and is, absolutely innocent of the debt of sin, and yet He was willing to pay our debts for us. He was willing even to suffer death on the Cross, the instrument of torture perfected by the Romans to terrorize the citizens, in order to free us from that sin.

God loves us. This is the only answer that can be or that ever need be. It is our salvation. It makes all things understandable. There may still be paradox, but in the light of the Love of God, even a paradox makes sense.

Let us pray.

O Lord, thou hast loved us, even to death on the Cross. Thou gave thy body that we might be free from our debt of sin. Even at thy last moments, thou were full of love, forgiving and promising the thieves to thy left and right that they would enter paradise with thee. Forgive us when we fail thee, Lord, and like them, and all thy Saints, bring us into the joy of thy eternal kingdom. This we beg of thy endless mercy. *Amen.*

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The Rev. Larry Wagoner, MSW¹⁰
March 24, 2013

¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on Palm Sunday, 2013.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xx (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Zechariah 9:9-12 (KJV).

⁴ “Upon any Sunday or Holy Day, the Minister may read the Epistle or the Gospel of the Day in place of the Second Lesson at Morning or Evening

crowd and despite his own statement that he knew Jesus to be innocent, condemned our innocent Lord to die. Pilate's soldiers put a robe in the colors of royalty on Jesus, only then to spit on Him and mock Him, then thereafter to force Him to carry the Cross to Golgotha, where they would crucify Him with a sign over His head proclaiming Him King of the Jews.

On the way to His crucifixion, Jesus was so wearied by His torture that the soldiers forced another man, Simon of Cyrene [*sigh-REE-knee*], to carry the Cross, because they were afraid that Jesus might die before He got to Calvary, and thus deprive them of their chance to kill Him.

The priests of the people, whose job it was to pray for them and to encourage their belief in God, mocked Jesus as He hung on the Cross, and even blasphemed God, saying, "*He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*"⁹ The Son of God, innocent of all sin, condemned to be crucified and die the horrible, shameful death of the Cross. The holder of infinite power, submitting to being beaten, tortured and killed by the officials of a tiny rebellious province in a nondescript corner of the world.

At every turn, we find paradox on top of paradox, surrounded by more paradox. Why would God allow such a thing to happen? How could the all-powerful be so humiliated, and eventually killed, by mere humans? And yet, through it all, runs a single common thread that cuts through all of it and allows all of the seemingly incomprehensible to make sense.

God loves us. He loves us so much that He is willing even to suffer for us. God loves us so much that He was willing that His Son would be given up to take away our sins. This is how it can all make sense. This is how things beyond comprehension can be.

He is God, and yet He came to be one of us, frail, subject to temptation and failure. Still, He did not fail, nor give in

just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.

"Then released he Barabbas [*buh-ROBB-uss*] unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

"And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene [*sigh-REE-knee*], Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha [*GAHL-guh-thuh*], that is to say, a place of a skull,

"They gave him vinegar⁶ to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

"And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about

the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani [**EE-lye, EE-lye, LAH-mah sah-BOCK-thu-nye**]? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.⁷ And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “*And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*”⁸ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

A paradox is defined by Webster’s as “*a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.*” A paradox can be a simple statement, such as “Nobody goes to that place--it’s too crowded,” where there seems to be an inherent contradiction in the statement. Some-

times paradoxes are deeply philosophical, others are funny. Some seem to reflect on the absurd contradictions in human life: “Good fences make good neighbors,” or perhaps, “no pain, no gain.”

Some paradoxes involve situations in which the facts seem to be self-contradictory, or seem to fly in the face of all reason and understanding. So appears the end of the life of our Lord. He is God Himself, and yet, He is a servant to the least of us. He holds all power, all authority, and will be judge of all, and yet He came to life as one of us to create for us a way to forgiveness and to escape Judgment.

Perhaps the greatest paradox of them all came on the way to that end, in which the Judge of all creation was Himself judged by a corrupt and weak man, who, while he was ruler over the people of Palestine, yet permitted himself to be pushed around by those very ones over whom he held authority.

Consider the facts of the trial of Jesus. Our Lord was betrayed not by an outsider, not by an enemy, but by one of His own chosen disciples. Despite having heard the very words of Jesus and travelled with Him through the land, having heard with his own ears what benefit could be had by following Jesus, Judas decided instead to turn traitor and betray Jesus for money.

That traitor, paid in silver for identifying Jesus to the soldiers of Pilate, then tried to give the money back and ended up taking his own life.

The crowds of Jerusalem, when offered the chance to free Jesus, chose instead to free the thief and murderer Barabbas [**buh-ROBB-uss**]. These were the very same people who, only a few days earlier, had been deliriously chanting in the streets, “Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest to the Son of David!”

Pilate, sitting as judge and ruler, with the authority of life or death in Palestine, allowed himself to be swayed by the