

## **In Dying**

Death and Life: Part 1 “In Dying”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – April 2, 2023

Palm/Passion Sunday

**Readings:** Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:27-50

**Reflection:** Psalm 118

### **Proclamation of the Entrance into Jerusalem:**

Hear from the Gospel according to Matthew how our Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem.

*When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying 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. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “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.” The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The 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!” When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”*  
(Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV\*)

**Greeting:** Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

**Prayer:** Almighty God, on this day your Son Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem and was proclaimed King by those who spread their garments and palm branches along his way. Let those branches be for us sings of his victory, and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our Lord, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life. Let us know Christ in death and life, so that we may truly learn how to live. Help us prepare our hearts and lives to be transformed by your love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 118

*The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.” I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has punished me severely, but he*

*did not give me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 118:14-29 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 118 and hear of trusting in God. We find salvation in the Lord through his enduring love. How do you experience God's love in the midst of celebration and triumph? How do you experience God's love in the midst of hurt and loss? Do you carry the conviction that God is with you during all of those times? How can you help others experience that love? How do we join together to celebrate Christ in all the ways that we live?

**Prayer:** O God, we turn to you in prayer this day. Help us to remember your great compassion for your people as shown to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. May you help us to prepare to have our hearts and lives be changed through your mercy and grace. We pray that you will be with us as we lift up our prayers to you on this day. May you help us to celebrate as those who joined the festal procession with palm branches and rejoicing. May you strengthen us in sorrow as those who bore witness to the suffering on the cross. Help us in our laughter and our tears to know that through it all you are Lord. And may you strengthen our hearts and grant us peace through your Son, our Savior. And in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from Matthew chapter 27 verse 27 through verse 50.

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and 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!" They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among*

*themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Then two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and 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." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "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. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, 'I am God's Son.' " The rebels who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And 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?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At 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. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. (Matthew 27:27-50 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This Sunday marks the beginning of our three-part series in which we will be looking at death, resurrection, and life. We begin with this first message in which we recognize death. It is in dying that we understand Christ's sacrifice. This Sunday can feel like a roller coaster. We have celebration and sorrow all mingled together in one day. But I think that helps to highlight the feelings that can come with sudden tragedy. We go from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem today to a dark death on the cross. We have two very different feelings in our readings today. We began with the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. When Jesus arrives in town, he arrives as a king. He enters on a donkey. The crowds are spreading cloaks along the road. They are cutting branches and spreading them on the path. He is lead along the festal procession as they proclaim that "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" This is the welcome they give to the prophet who arrives as a king. But we see a king's welcome is very different for those in charge. Those who fear losing their power have no room for a new king. Those who fear others having hope have a very different reception for Jesus. We see it in those who gather around Christ to mock him. They put a scarlet robe on him and give him a crown of thorns. They turn him into a mockery of a king as they spit on him and strike him. They beat Christ while proclaiming him to be the King of the Jews, a title to mock him and also the charge against him.

There's a reason that I think about this in terms of power. Much of what Jesus taught was bringing comfort to the afflicted and discomfort to those in power. Jesus teaches the first will be last and the last will be first. Those who oppress others will be brought low, and the oppressed will find freedom. But this also serves as a stark reminder that those in power can be cruel in doing everything they can to destroy hope. And it is there that we come to an important point for today. We remember that Christ did not die so that we would lose hope. No, indeed Christ died that we would gain hope eternal. In Jesus we have a friend giving his life so

that we would understand true sacrifice. That we would understand the love and compassion that God has for us. That we would understand how far Christ's love for us would go. Jesus' death demonstrates to us the overwhelming power of forgiveness. He shows us the power of redemption. He shows us that he has power over death. However, we also see just how real the pain is and just how human Christ is on the cross. When we hear him cry out "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" or "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" we hear an echo of the 22nd Psalm. In it, it speaks of hurt and sorrow. But we also hear words of hope. I think that is part of the struggle that we have on this day.

We must not let our hope be crushed when things grow dim. When things are at their darkest, we are reminded that we still have hope. We have hope even in the face of death. We have hope in what is yet to come. We carry with us hope in more than we know in this life. In Christ we have hope in a brighter tomorrow, even in the darkest of days. But I'm also reminded that this is not a hope that we simply wait for. It is a hope that we live. In death there is hope of resurrection. In death there is hope of life. That thoughts and prayers are born from our hope, and action is born from our prayers. And I think we see a stark reminder that even in tragic death we may find purpose. That we can find strength to challenge those who would oppress others. That we find strength to oppose those who would have us cling to fear instead of hope. That those who spread hate will find no footing among those who share love. That those who desire power over others will find they have none when we turn our hearts towards justice. We let that hope guide us, not just to wait for a better tomorrow, but we let the Spirit lead us into working for a better tomorrow. Christ's death on the cross is a stark reminder for us all. A reminder that there will be dark days. A reminder that there will be grief. A reminder that there will be loss.

In dying, we see Christ give his all so that we can understand the true sacrifice. His death teaches us so that we can understand the concept of giving of ourselves for others because of what's right. We learn that not even death may stop the Good News of Jesus Christ. We remember his sacrifice so that in tragedy we are able to raise our voices that much louder to sing out "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!" May we bless the ones who speak of the peace of Christ in a troubled world. That we lift up those who speak of change in the Holy Spirit. That we remember the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father. So that we may all truly live. And that in dying we are reminded of the price that was paid so that we could always know hope. So let us not forget that hope. May it be that our voices speak for those who have been silenced. Let us speak for those who have been persecuted. Let us speak for those who have been beaten and spat upon but to speak for those who are powerless. Let us speak for them until their own voices may be heard, so that we may all know justice and we may all know peace. Because our Savior gives us strength, and in dying gives us life and demonstrates to us true love. Let us share in that love and let us stand up for all those in need. That we may truly understand our Savior's gift for us through sacrifice. So that we may know love and we may share love. That all may be united, and all may be set free in Christ. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Death and Life**

Our current series is a 3-part exploration of death and life. We will work our way through death on a cross, resurrection, and what it means for how we live. We begin with Palm Sunday, Easter, and the Sunday after. Each week confronts another part of our faith journey through death and life.

**April 2nd** – *In Dying* – Matthew 21:1-11; Matthew 27:27-50

**April 9th** – *In Rising* – John 20:1-18; Acts 10:34-43

**April 16th** – *In Living* – Acts 2:14a, 22-32; 1 Peter 1:3-9

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Our Healthcare Workers	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Phyllis Gabel	Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Phil Hawickhorst
Ray Carr	Jane Williams	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Family of Kyle Lehman	Corrine Howard	Stacy Janes	Don Gilmore
Shirley Jester	Connie Brown	Jack Pitcher	Family of Alberta Darling
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson
Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins		

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