

The Tomb: Laid to Rest

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 29 2026

Palm/Passion Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54 CEB

Reflection: Matthew 21:1-11

Call to Worship: 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. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. (Psalm 118)

Prayer: Everlasting God, we thank you for the tender mercy you show to all people. We are thankful that you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be of our flesh, and to suffer death on a cross, that all could see and follow the example of his great humility. Help us to overcome the many difficulties that we face in this life. May you always strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may understand all that you have shown us through Jesus Christ. Let us remember his triumphant entrance into the city and the terrible sadness of the cross. Mercifully grant that we can follow the example of patience and love shown to us in Jesus. May we embrace his resurrection that we may know life and have it abundantly. Heavenly Father, watch over us in worship this day. Guide us in singing and prayer by your Spirit. And help us to gather in the peace and the love of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Matthew 21:1-11

¹ When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. ² He said to them, "Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them." He sent them off right away. ⁴ Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, ⁵ Say to Daughter Zion, "Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey's offspring." ⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them. ⁸ Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. "Who is this?" they asked. ¹¹ The crowds answered, "It's the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:1-11 CEB+)

We read the words of Matthew, and we hear of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. That the crowds shout with joy at the coming of Christ. They lay their palm branches along the road to welcome the Messiah. But this triumph is contrasted with tragedy of the crucifixion. How do we turn to God in both the good and the bad? How will you prepare yourself for this Holy Week

ahead of us? What does the life and death of Christ mean for you? How can we prepare our hearts and our lives to be ready for all things with Christ?

Prayer: Gracious God, you know our hearts and our lives; we are ever before you exposed and vulnerable. We turn to you once more as we seek your guidance and your mercy in our lives. May you bless us and keep us in all that we are and do. We give thanks for the many wonderful things we see every day. We thank you for the joys we share here together and for the joys that stir in our secret heart. We also turn to you with the concerns that we have, knowing that you are always listening. We look to you as our rock in shifting sand and as the calm in the storm. We lift up to you the worries that we keep deep inside and the worries that we share as a community. May you pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as we remember the joy of entering into Jerusalem and the sorrow of the cross on this day. Let us remember that you are there for us always with an abundance of love and mercy. May you lead us through the good and the bad, through the confusion and the unknown, that we may follow you always. May we walk with you through sorrow and joy, knowing that you are our all in all. May we rest assured because of the salvation we find in your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 50, verses 4 through 9a.

⁴ The Lord God gave me an educated tongue to know how to respond to the weary with a word that will awaken them in the morning. God awakens my ear in the morning to listen, as educated people do. ⁵ The Lord God opened my ear; I didn't rebel; I didn't turn my back. ⁶ Instead, I gave my body to attackers, and my cheeks to beard pluckers. I didn't hide my face from insults and spitting. ⁷ The Lord God will help me; therefore, I haven't been insulted. Therefore, I set my face like flint, and knew I wouldn't be ashamed. ⁸ The one who will declare me innocent is near. Who will argue with me? Let's stand up together. Who will bring judgment against me? Let him approach me. ⁹ Look! The Lord God will help me. Who will condemn me? (Isaiah 50:4-9a CEB+)

Our second reading is from Philippians chapter 2, verses 5 through 11.

⁵ Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: ⁶ Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. ⁷ But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, ⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore, God highly honored him and gave him a name above all names, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Matthew chapter 27, verses 11 through 54.

¹¹ Jesus was brought before the governor. The governor said, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "That's what you say." ¹² But he didn't answer when the chief priests and elders accused him. ¹³ Then Pilate said, "Don't you hear the testimony they bring against you?" ¹⁴ But he didn't answer, not even a single word. So the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵ It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. ¹⁶ At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ When the crowd had come together, Pilate asked them, "Whom would you like me to release to you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ He knew that the leaders of the people had handed him over because of jealousy. ¹⁹ While he was serving as judge, his wife sent this message to him, "Leave that righteous man alone. I've suffered much today in a dream because of him." ²⁰ But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and kill Jesus. ²¹ The governor said, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" "Barabbas," they replied. ²² Pilate said, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify him!" ²³ But he said, "Why? What wrong has he done?" They shouted even louder, "Crucify him!" ²⁴ Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere and that a riot was starting. So he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I'm innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It's your problem." ²⁵ All the people replied, "Let his blood be on us and on our children." ²⁶ Then he released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus whipped, then handed him over to be crucified. ²⁷ The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the governor's house, and they gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a red military coat on him. ²⁹ They twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They put a stick in his right hand. Then they bowed down in front of him and mocked him, saying, "Hey! King of the Jews!" ³⁰ After they spit on him, they took the stick and struck his head again and again. ³¹ When they finished mocking him, they stripped him of the military coat and put his own clothes back on him. They led him away to crucify him. ³² As they were going out, they found Simon, a man from Cyrene. They forced him to carry his cross. ³³ When they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place, ³⁴ they gave Jesus wine mixed with vinegar to drink. But after tasting it, he didn't want to drink it. ³⁵ After they crucified him, they divided up his clothes among them by drawing lots. ³⁶ They sat there, guarding him. ³⁷ They placed above his head the charge against him. It read, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." ³⁸ They crucified with him two outlaws, one on his right side and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who were walking by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "So you were going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, were you? Save yourself! If you are God's Son, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ In the same way, the chief priests, along with the legal experts and the elders, were making fun of him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others, but he can't save himself. He's the king of Israel, so let him come down from the cross now. Then we'll believe in him." ⁴³ He trusts in God, so let God deliver him now if he wants to. He said, "I'm God's Son." ⁴⁴ The outlaws who were crucified with him insulted him in the same way. ⁴⁵ From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. ⁴⁶ At about three Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani," which means, "My God, my God, why have you left me?" ⁴⁷ After hearing him, some standing there said, "He's calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ One of them ran over, took a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a pole. He

offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest of them said, "Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." ⁵⁰ Again Jesus cried out with a loud shout. Then he died. ⁵¹ Look, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, ⁵² and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised. ⁵³ After Jesus' resurrection they came out of their graves and went into the holy city where they appeared to many people. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what had just happened, they were filled with awe and said, "This was certainly God's Son." (Matthew 27:11-54 CEB+)

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

Today we look at a bit of an emotional rollercoaster of a day. We think of this day as Palm Sunday, celebrating the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. We think of this as Passion Sunday, thinking of Christ's death on the cross. This series is a two-part series covering this Sunday and next week's Easter message, with the series being called "The Tomb." Today we see Christ laid to rest, what looks like the end of his journey. I wanted to think about what all that means for us. One of the reasons that we look at the crucifixion now is because often if we do not take part in all of the services throughout Holy Week, we would go from this Sunday to next without ever touching on the crucifixion. I think it's important that we do take time to reflect on it.

Now, as I said, we began this service with the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, with the crowds shouting, waving palm branches, laying them in the road, celebrating the coming of Christ the King. In those celebrations, they are celebrating that Jesus is entering Jerusalem and they celebrate what it is he brings. It's such a bright moment. But I think it helps to create contrast because it shows us just how unexpected everything was. They come waving branches for a triumphant King and they then see him nailed to a cross. Our readings today mostly center around the crucifixion. But I had this feeling of the combination of this high and this low when we read Isaiah, because it to me speaks to that feeling of knowing that God is in charge while trying to accept human actions. "Who will bring judgment against me? Let him approach me. Look, the Lord God will help me. Who will condemn me?" We know we have no reason to be ashamed when we walk with the Lord. But it doesn't mean that we are free from the way others may treat us. We stand firm in our faith, even if others want to hold it over us. Because the example that we are given in Christ is to remain strong.

It's what we hear in Philippians. That "When he found himself in the form of a human, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." A death to demonstrate to us what love looks like. A death to demonstrate to us what true sacrifice is. So that we would know we are loved. So that we would know we are saved. So that we would know we were set free from sin and death. Christ humbles himself, empties himself, to take his place on the cross. It's a humbling thing to think about, and it highlights the injustice this world can bring. But it also highlights that God is with us no matter what. Because there is a lot to look at when we look at the crucifixion. This shows us something about the world and the need to punish those who would stand up for what is right. Jesus stood up for justice, for truth.

He stood up to oppose the proud and those who would lift themselves up at the expense of others. Jesus opposes the oppressors. He opposes the people who would hold us down, the

people who would see us suffer before they would see us be free. People who would use the name of God to enrich themselves. Who would use the name of God not out of reverence but in a bid to get what they want. And we still see this today. People who think they can simply claim God desires what they want. People who claim to speak for God when the only voice that matters to them is their own. The people are offered a choice. The criminal Barabbas or Jesus. And the people in charge rile up the crowds to pick Barabbas because Jesus was a threat to their control. A threat to their power. One of the things I often do in thinking about the crucifixion is that I reflect on the fact that Jesus is going through everything that they would do to any of us. Because if we believe in the gospel message, we are opposed to those same powers. Those same powers are still after us today. The powers that want us to be selfish instead of generous. The powers that want us to be cruel instead of kind. The powers who want us to think only of ourselves and not others. The powers who will paint an enemy as the other so that they can get what they want out of us. People who would gladly send us to die if it meant they fulfil their own selfish desires. That they would just as readily beat and mock us for believing in the goodness of God. It is a difficult thing to hear.

When we think of Christ laid to rest in the tomb, it is at the pinnacle of distress. They force another man to carry his cross. He is beaten, humiliated, and crucified. They nail him to the cross. All because he believed in justice. In freedom. In serving God with his whole being. He was crucified because he proclaimed the message that you should love your neighbor as yourself and that you should love God with your whole being. It made me think about that centurion, filled with awe. He has a realization in what must have felt like a moment too late. He looks upon this broken and beaten body on the cross and realizes "This was certainly God's Son." It is a moving moment before he is laid to rest in the tomb. What it made me think of is that I don't want to realize too late when goodness is right in front of me. I don't want to recognize a moment too late that I have seen love, only to see it disappear. I don't want to look a moment too late and see hope slip away. That's what I hear when I read the words of the centurion who just a moment late realizes this was certainly God's Son.

I want us to carry the weight of that with us through this Holy Week. I want us to think about it as we think about the tomb sealed shut. Because I want us to carry the weight of that situation and the weight of the tomb with us. I want us to every day to be remembering Christ's sacrifice. That through it all, he remained faithful to his mission to show God's love to the world. Even when being humiliated. Even when being reviled. Even when what he said was hated by those with power, he held true to that faith. A salvation that is there for you and for me. So let us walk with that darkness in this week to come. That we may truly reflect on the death of our Savior. And let it be carried with us until we return to the tomb on Easter morning. 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 – The Tomb

Our series for Easter is a two-part series that follows Christ from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem through the crucifixion and to the resurrection. We call it “The Tomb” as we see him laid to rest and then witness that he is risen. We explore the journey that we take through the passion and into the resurrection, following Christ always. Let us remember the tomb where sorrow is laid to rest and hope is born.

3/29: Laid to Rest

4/5: He Is Risen

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut

PO Box 610

Neoga, IL 62447

(217)895-2809

Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

Toledo, IL 62468

Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

Mattoon, IL 61938

Worship 9:30a

Rev Camron D St.Michael

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(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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