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First Presbyterian Church, Willmar MN  
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**John 12:12-27; 19:16b-22**

### **Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem**

12 The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—  
the King of Israel!

<sup>14</sup>Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

<sup>15</sup>'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!

<sup>16</sup>His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. <sup>17</sup>So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. <sup>18</sup>It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. <sup>19</sup>The Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

### **Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus**

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup>They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' <sup>22</sup>Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup>Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup>Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

### **Jesus Speaks about His Death**

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27 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

### **The Crucifixion of Jesus (19: 16b-22)**

<sup>16</sup>Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; <sup>17</sup>and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. <sup>18</sup>There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. <sup>19</sup>Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' <sup>20</sup>Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. <sup>21</sup>Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' <sup>22</sup>Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

Today's texts begin and end in deep irony.

The people gathered as Jesus entered Jerusalem. They waved palm branches which were a sign of political acclimation and military victory as he entered the gates. They expected that this would be the man who would rally the zealots and enlist the army to overthrow the Romans. He would bring freedom to the Hebrews and kick the oppressive Romans out of the Promised Land.

But instead of riding a great stallion at the head of columns of armored troops, Jesus selected a humble donkey's colt to ride into the city alongside a bedraggled bunch of country bumpkins clad in the clothes of peasants.

The people expected glory. They expected a glorious revolution of the Jews, the ousting of Caesar and the coming reign of a Jewish monarchy that would rival the great line of David and Solomon.

And indeed, Jesus says the hour had come to glorify him, but instead of the glory of a throne, he delivers this enigmatic line, "<sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate

their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Jesus' glory would not come from a new dynasty of David, it would come dying as grain falling to the ground to give new life.

The Sanhedrin were convinced the Jesus was going to foment revolution. He had claimed to usher in a new kingdom. They feared he would bring battles, chaos, and slaughter as the Romans crushed their feeble hopes of independence. They feared the way in which Jesus claimed messianic titles such as the, "Son of God," and claimed that he was one with the Father. They feared that all of this would cause the delicate balance they had established with their Roman overlords, and they would be stripped of their positions of power and influence.

And, indeed, Jesus had come to usher in a new kingdom, but as he told Pilate, his "kingdom is not of this world." Instead of war, it would bring peace. Instead of the stallion, it brought the colt. Instead of the sword, it brought the dove. Instead of the money-changer's table, it brought bread and fish for everyone. Instead of the exploitation of the lame, the sick, the poor, and the blind, it brought healing, restoration, and justice.

Pilate was convinced that Jesus was a two bit revolutionary from the sticks coming to raise a rebellion against Rome. Or, at least he was a Jewish rabble rouser from embroiled in a religious squabble with the Sanhedrin and threatened the peace. Either way, he was of no consequence to Pilate or to Rome, and his life was disposable. He meant next to nothing to anyone or anything of consequence. So it was probably with no great regret Pilate ordered Jesus' execution. And, to mock the Jews for wasting his time with this inconsequential case, he chose to nail a placard above Jesus' head on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. This done, despite the protests of the Sanhedrin, lest anyone miss what happens to anyone who chose to threaten the power of Imperial Rome.

Of course, the irony all along, despite being misunderstood, mocked, and executed, is that Pilate had labeled Jesus correctly. Jesus is, was, and will be the King of the Jews. Not only just the King of the Jews, but the King of all creation. King of Kings. Lord of Lords. In trying to mock Jesus, he had named him truly.

Irony piled on irony, until the bitter end. A path that led from the gates of Jerusalem where he was adulated with palms, to Golgotha, a place that

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resembled a skull, and stood for all that is grim and horrible: execution at the hands of the empire, isolation, mockery, death, and loss.

And, why? Why, we wonder? And in the stark face of this event, we are all left to answer this question. What leads the world to reject the Son of God? What caused us to misunderstand so profoundly? What caused us to nail our messiah to the cross?

When I was a kid, I misunderstood some things about Jesus. I think I grew up hearing stories of Jesus and coming to think of him as a superhuman. I think this is easy to do, right? We hear stories of miraculous healings, walking on water, turning the water into wine, and casting out demons, and we start think of, well someone akin to a superhero. Jesus then becomes someone who's not really even human. He's just like Superman, an alien from another planet living among us, occasionally dashing off to the phone booth to shuck his human disguise and emerge in his costume to save the day.

But that misbelief fails when confronted by the cross and all it's ironies. It exposes our own broken and ironic expectation of Jesus, that he would just scoop up all of the world's problems and solve them. That he would just zap Pilate, or refute the Sanhedrin, or use his powers to jump down from the cross. Or that he would blast the soldiers with their hammers and nails and step off Golgotha's hill and reveal it was all a big cosmic joke.

But he didn't. Why? Because the text tells us "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," (John 1: 14). And not just "sort of" becoming one of us; not just faking it as a superhuman alien in human disguise - But fully becoming one of us. Assuming full humanity. Look to the ways we've seen this over the past few months in our lessons from John: Attending a wedding party with his friends; Getting thirsty and asking for a drink at the well with the Samaritan woman; Standing outside of the tomb with his friend and weeping over their loss; And today, the cross. Jesus is nailed to the beams, hoisted above the gathered crowd, and is propped up between two criminals. Jesus experienced real agony to the point of an all too real death.

Why? Because, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Because Jesus wasn't faking this human thing. Because the only way Jesus could show us the way was to become one us. Well and truly, and genuinely one of us. To hurt

like us, laugh like us, grieve like us, thirst like us, love like us, and ultimately to suffer like us, die like us. This is the deep mystery and beauty of the incarnation, that God chose to empty Godself in Jesus. Paul ponders its mystery this way when he says,

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2: 5-8)

Why? To compound irony and irony even further, in order to display the glory of God. To declare that the truly glorious forces of the universe aren't imperial or political, they are loving, sacrificial, generous, forgiving, and imbued with grace. In order to demonstrate that God is with us. Truly, utterly, fully, even unto point of suffering an all to real and human death. St Gregory of Nazianzus, an ancient theologian of the church put it like this, “that which is not assumed is not redeemed.” In other words, God in Jesus had to assume the fullness of humanity in order to gather in the entirety of human experience: The love, the joy, the shame, the pain, the hurt, and yes, even the death. In order that the fullness of these experiences might be redeemed in him. In order that the sin and death of the world might be judged: to bring final judgement upon human systems that respond to justice and peace with swords and crucifixes. In order that we cannot miss the idea that there is a different way, a better way, and it is characterized by sacrificial love, poured out upon a cross, for all the world to see.

My prayer for us this morning is that we heed the true message of the cross - That God held nothing back for our sake, that we are loved unto the point of death. And that same love is eternal and vast, and accessible to you and I today. May you believe, and may you be saved.

Alleluia and Amen.