

Palmarum  
9 April, Anno Domini 2017  
St. Matthew 27:11-54  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The charge was simple - "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." In many ways it was the only charge leveled against Jesus that was true. And therein lies the great scandal and offense of the Christian faith. The man hung from the cross by nails, torn apart by Roman scourges, ridiculed and spit on by Jews and Gentiles, is the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the long-promised Messiah. And He is King precisely **because** he is hanging there dying for the world, dying for you and for me. There, forsaken by man AND by God, Jesus is the conquering King, robbing Satan of his kingdom and your soul.

There is no other Jesus than the one despised and rejected by men, smitten by God and afflicted. Only in those six hours from 6am to 3pm, is the kingdom of God fully seen. Only in the deepest hours of His humiliation can you know and rightly understand Jesus because there you see God saving sinners from death. That's why even Jesus' disciples were constantly perplexed - because there still wasn't a death and a resurrection. Everything in His ministry is defined by and fulfilled in the cross. It's no exaggeration to say that you can't know God apart from the crucified Jesus.

In that phrase "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" hanging over the Suffering Servant, every miracle is explained, every teaching is made clear, every false doctrine ever preached and every attempt by man to justify himself is silenced. That's why the world despises the cross and never wants to see it. If God's Son was actually crucified and raised from the dead then the world with its works and wisdom are evil. If the dying Jesus is the King of the Jews, then God's mercy is the way of salvation not a self-absorbed life of self-appointed holiness. The world understands this and hates it and will stop at nothing to silence the preaching of Christ crucified because the world loves itself and its works and hates God and His mercy.

Even many who bear the Name of Christ are ashamed of Jesus' humiliation - from His triumphal entry on the back of a donkey to the final cry "My God,

my God, why have you forsaken me?” Our sinful flesh wants to rush past Good Friday, turning our eyes away because Jesus’ death looks so sad and ugly. And if we think our salvation depends on our work, then, yes, Jesus death is just a very sad reminder of how bad we are...and nothing more. As good a movie as Mel Gibson’s “The Passion” was, this is really where he got it all wrong. He believes that we are supposed to feel sorry for Jesus and how terribly tragic and unjust the whole thing was.

But that isn’t what Jesus wants. That’s isn’t at all why He went to the cross. In fact, he rebuked the women who were mourning and lamenting FOR HIM, telling them “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Jesus doesn’t want you to feel sorry for Him. His suffering was absolutely awful but, as we sing in that beautiful hymn, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” “Yes, Father, yes, **most willingly**, All this I **gladly** suffer.” Jesus is happy to do it. He is driven up to Golgotha by His great love for you. He isn’t thinking of Himself as the thorny crown is pressed into His head or the nails are driven through His hands and feet. He is thinking of you. He is thinking of how wonderful it is that in just a few short hours all your sins will be paid for, Satan’s power over you will be unraveled, and you will be free. Jesus rejoices that He is being offered up by the Father’s love to save you. He wouldn’t have it any other way.

This is why true faith finds such great joy and peace in hearing the Passion and staring deeply at Jesus hanging on the cross. It’s why Christians, in a way that seems so backwards and sadistic to the world, love Holy Week and Good Friday and want to set everything else aside in order to hear again and again about Jesus death and gather around the altar to receive the Body and Blood that were offered as sacrifice for us. It’s why, during Holy Week, we take the opportunity to hear all four accounts of Jesus’ death. Not because we’re sadistic but because we love to hear of our salvation and the love of God for sinners. Yes, it takes time. But what better reason for a pause in the midst of the craziness and the harshness of life than to hear again of the immeasurable love of Christ and all that He has borne for you? It’s why we love our crosses full and our tombs empty. It’s a stumbling block to the proud but to the humble, to the one who knows he is nothing and has nothing, the bruised, bloodied, dead Jesus is and is meant by God to be the most beautiful thing in the world. Because there, the King of the Jews, the Lord of heaven and earth, is saving us from death

and the judgment we deserve. There the love of God is literally pouring out the sacred veins of Jesus of Nazareth.

And just as Jesus is known only in the midst of His suffering and hanging on the cross, so it is with us, His dear children. The true strength and beauty of your Lord and Savior is known in His weakness. It is no different for you. Your true strength and beauty are known in your weakness and your own suffering, as you bear the crosses that are laid upon you in faith commending your life into the hands of the one who died for you, the one who was forsaken by the Father so that you can be certain that the Father will never forsake you. Your strength isn't you. The Lord is your strength and only when you are weak, when the hollowness of your own strength is known, can the true strength of God be known. As the Lord said to St. Paul "My power is made perfect in your weakness."

The world and our flesh believe suffering and weakness are to be despised and avoided at all costs. They would have us believe that Christians are measured by their success and their own holiness. How easily we are tempted to despise our cross rather than take it up, despising it's shame, and follow Christ. Dear child of God, in your suffering God is working out your salvation and strengthening the roots of your trust in Him. Don't be afraid of weakness and humility. That is what unbelief does. Don't try to make yourself into what you think you should be. Let Christ form you and mold you in the cross into what He wants you to be. Do not be afraid to die with Christ because only by dying with Him can you rise to new and eternal life with Him. Embrace your times of trial and testing with Christ and see what the world can't see, the great glory that lies behind the cross.

The unbelieving world will never understand Good Friday. They will always laugh with the Romans and the Jews finding it completely foolish that our King and our God would die. They will despise your God and you with Him. Their gods are gods of strength and power, merciless gods who destroy the weak and reward the strong. Their gods are inoffensive. Their gods only exist to affirm the desires of their flesh and the imaginations of their minds. Those who trust in themselves will never find joy or peace in the events of this week. Those who think of their sins but lightly will think of Jesus' death but lightly and walk by wagging their heads, letting Good Friday pass without observance, without hearing the Word of God, without receiving the cross' fruit - the Body and the Blood offered for atonement. Do not let it be so among you. Let us rather, as the Baptized of God, eagerly gather at the

foot of the cross. Let us despise the world's mockery and embrace this dying Jesus of Nazareth as our King and our God.

In the Name of +Jesus.