

Sermon Notes – March 29, 2026
Peace Lutheran Church
Holy Gospel of St. Matthew 27: 11-54
“Glorified and Humiliated”

Every year, as on this Palm Sunday, we think about what might we observe ...the procession of palms ...or, the Passion of Jesus? The answer I might give would be, “Both.” The brilliance of this liturgical occasion is the ecstatic entry of Jesus into Jerusalem followed by the devastating, yet foretold, unfolding of His suffering and death - riotous hopes and inconsolable despair - collapsed into one moment. This pairing gives us a vision of the breadth of what Jesus' incarnation means to the world; we human beings love our saviors, but we turn against them when they don't deliver what we expected, and yet in the suffering of Christ ...beyond the rejection is the resurrection. But first there has to be this story.

We human beings do not expect God - God's Son - God's Son incarnate - God-with us – Immanuel - to exemplify the power to be willing to die. Instead, we sometimes venerate brute power, the kind that avoids death by inflicting death upon others. This is surely the case with Rome in the time of Jesus. But in Isaiah, the one who is being taunted says, “Therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; He who vindicates me is near” (Isa.50: 7-8). It is a steely resolve, and that orientation is what Philippians calls us to emulate, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2: 5). Because this is such a difficult bar to reach, we need to hear it.

Measured against Jesus, we clearly do not have the faith to set our intentions “like flint” that will not be moved or shamed. We are often ruled by fear that can cripple us. The story shows us a people (were they the same who shouted “Hosanna”?), so corrupted and manipulated, that they would choose to release a criminal – Barrabas - from prison and crucify, instead, a righteous man.

Notice several things in this story: Jesus' silence in front of His accusers; the crowd demanding He be killed, a demonstration of their fixation on hatred; and the mocking calls for Him to “save” Himself, a notion of salvation limited to physical survival. First, there is no defense to accusations that are lies. Second, the ridicule of a righteous person is an

expression of deep self-contempt and fear, allowing the accuser to project hate upon the innocent. Third, people whose definition of salvation is focused on immediate gratification are living with imaginations too rigid to be expanded. Finally, Jesus' cry of abandonment tells us how deeply His suffering echoes our own sometimes. When we are unable to enter into someone else's pain, we are not always able to experience the love of God. When Jesus died, the natural world erupted, giving insight to a military commander, the centurion, about Jesus' true identity as God's Son. Not only did rocks created by God crack apart, but so did a curtain created by human hands. In other words, all of creation - natural and manufactured - resounds with the injustice of rejecting the innocent.