

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

March 28, 2021 – PALM / PASSION SUNDAY (YR. B)

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Homily: “*Jesus’ Final Week—All Because of Love*”

Isaiah 45:21-25 (Every knee shall bow before the Lord)
Psalm 22:1-7 (The victorious king trusts in God)
Philippians 2:5-11 (God exalted Jesus above anyone in heaven or earth)
St. Mark 14:32—15:47 (The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

Every year on this day, we hear the Gospels’ account of Jesus, His Heavenly Father, the disciples, the people of first-century Jerusalem, and the terrible events of Christ’s last days on earth, the final week—a week that changed the world, forever.

That week began with exuberant joy, for many Jewish people had come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the One for whom they had longed and prayed for centuries. Finally, He had arrived! But just when it all seemed that the words of the Scriptures and the prophets, as well as their dreams, were being fulfilled, and the world would definitively know God had triumphed—their Messiah was arrested, put on trial, mocked, ridiculed, whipped, spit upon, and found guilty. Guilty of what? Guilty of claiming that He had come from God, and He was indeed the Messiah, God’s Anointed One. Usually, when the whole truth comes out at a trial, the defendant is acquitted. But Jesus, an innocent man, was crucified for telling the greatest truth ever—that He was, in fact, the long-awaited Savior of not only the Nation of Israel, but of the entire world.

Those who did believe in Jesus then, and many who would come after, looked for an answer to why God, who loved the world so much that He gave us His only begotten Son, allowed *us* to destroy Him on the Cross. Moreover, how could an outcome so unfair, so horrible, be turned into a victory that would change not only their lives and ours, but the world, and the very *universe*, forever?

The reason we are sitting here this morning is not because Jesus was wise. It’s not because of the miracles He did or the wonders He performed. It’s because from His birth to His death, He emptied Himself of His divine power and prerogative so that He could be one of us. And it was as a human being that He paid the price for our sins on the Cross. Yes, Jesus is also God in the flesh, but God does not bleed, suffer, and die, as a person does. For Christ’s atoning sacrifice for our sins to be meaningful and effective for our salvation, it had to come from both our humanity *in Him*, and our inhumanity *toward Him*.

All of this is summed up in one of the oldest poems or songs written by Christians from the first century. The believers who composed it were from Philippi, a town in Greece, now called Kavàla. Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians in his epistle. And in it, he quoted their hymn of praise back to them because by that time the Philippians were besieged and under great persecution as Jesus was, and they needed this encouragement:

“Christ the Messiah, Jesus our Lord, *though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

This ancient hymn of praise explains everything from Jesus’ birth through His death and resurrection. We can ponder it forever, and never quite grasp its reality, because Christ’s life, ministry, and His ongoing work are all miracles of God and mysteries of our faith. What we can hold fast to, especially when we are discouraged, doubting, and despondent, is that Jesus came to us out of love; He lived His life out of love; He died for us out of love, and because He put love in the center of the universe, it can never be removed. That is why our best and only hope is to follow Jesus of Nazareth, the humble carpenter and rabbi who is also King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and who loves every one of us, unconditionally, and will, forever—no matter what. *Amen.*