

A Better Life: 6. Hosanna Living
Matthew 26:1-13
April 5, 2020
Pastor Steve Richards

If last October, someone had told me that in six months all of our schools would be closed, students at colleges and universities would be sent home, all sporting events would be cancelled, restaurants would be closed and any food that was ordered would be carried to my car by someone wearing a mask and gloves. hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans would suddenly be without work, and those who had jobs would be working from home – and I would hear about the same thing happening, not just in Minnesota or the United States but in nations throughout the world – and all of this because an invisible virus was slowly circling the globe infecting millions of people like a slow-moving tsunami – I would have dismissed the whole idea Or I might have thought you were describing a television series from my childhood that was being revived. Anyone remember seeing an episode of the Twilight Zone? [video: into to “Twilight Zone”]

The writer and producer, Rod Serling would begin each episode by describing a scenario that seems plausible and at the same time implausible. He called it entering the Twilight Zone. And that almost seems the surreal place in which we are living, but unlike the Twilight Zone, we don't know how this episode will end. Maybe you've read about Bill Gates prediction of a pandemic five years ago and how it would have an economic impact much like what we are seeing today. But who would have believed it – clearly, it was not taken seriously.

I thought about this in recent weeks as I read the gospel of Matthew. Jesus, a traveling rabbi from Galilee, proclaimed a coming kingdom very different from anything people had ever experienced. He invited a group of twelve misfits and the only thing they seemed to have in common was an attraction to the person and message of Jesus. For three years, Jesus taught. He healed. He got close to people that no righteous rabbi would touch. His actions alienated the most religious while giving hope to the poor and forgotten that one day they would be part of a new kingdom. And at various points, Jesus told his followers: **The Human One will be handed over to be crucified.** No one believed it. No one took him seriously. They were on their way to Jerusalem – and Jesus would be the kingdom – and they would be part of his new kingdom – and, of course, the Roman Empire would be defeated – or so they thought.

That's the undercurrent as this parade of peasants enters the Gate to the city of Jerusalem. When the people see Jesus on the donkey they instantly recognize the sign. They wave leafy branches as they shout: **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!** But at the same time another procession was entering the Emperor's Gate at the opposite side of the city. This one was led by the Roman Governor named Pontius Pilate and escorted by a battalion of Roman soldiers with people shouting, “Blessings on the one who comes in the name of Caesar!” Two processions. Two kingdoms. On a collision course that only Jesus had been anticipating.

There's a back story to this scene and to understand what was happening, we have to go back to the fall of the year and the Feast of Tabernacles. In Leviticus, the people were commanded every year at the fall harvest to build small huts or booths (some Jews continue this practice today) to remember there was a time when their ancestors wandered in the wilderness and lived in such huts. They repeated Psalms 113-118. On the final day of the feast, Psalm 118 was read. Called the Great Hosanna because in verse 25, we find these words “LORD, save us” or in Hebrew HOSANNA. Then the people would take branches from leafy trees – willow, myrtle and

palm – bind them together, wave them overhead while remembering they were once in slavery in Egypt and God set them free – HOSANNA. They would walk around the Temple or synagogue, waving like this: hosanna - deliver us, reign over us and be our king.

One more historical note: In 165 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes ruled over Israel from Syria. He wanted the Jews to worship the Greek gods, but the Jews rebelled. Antiochus sent his troops, invaded Jerusalem, went into the Temple, set up an altar and offered a pig as a sacrifice to the god Zeus. It was an act of humiliation that enraged the people. There was a Jewish father with five sons who led the revolt against Antiochus. They went first to the Temple, cast out the Syrians, cleansed the Temple and rededicated it to God. That day is still celebrated in Hanukkah. Judas Maccabee was the oldest son and when he returned from pursuing the Syrians, he entered the city of Jerusalem and the people welcomed him by waving branches – Hosanna to the son of David.

So when we read in Matthew that the people were shouting Hosanna, what kind of king were they expecting? Cleanse the city of the Romans. Cast out our oppressors. Restore the glory of Israel. It would have looked a lot like the procession that entered from the opposite side of the city on that Palm Sunday. But, over the past few weeks, we have learned that Jesus was announcing a very different kind of kingdom – a new way of living that would lift up the poor and forgotten. This would be heaven here on earth. But the people did not understand, and by Friday the crowd that had shouted Hosanna would turn their backs on this new king and shout “Crucify” because he was not doing what they hoped. He was not answering their prayer – Hosanna.

Sometimes that still happens - even today. I come here hoping God will give me what I want, but instead what God does is give me what I need. And if we get that reversed, thinking we come here because God will give us what we want – Hosanna – only we don't get what we want and maybe we even get what we don't want – it is easy to shout Crucify – turn away from God. But turn away from God and we have turned away from the only one who will never abandon us. We are experiencing something that none of us fully understand, living through circumstance that none of us want – and yet, I'm hearing from some that they are receiving what they need: time to slow down, to be with family, to eat dinner together, to consider what's important. In the midst of circumstance we do not want, we receive something that we need.

In the evening, Jesus goes to Bethany, a small town outside Jerusalem, where he has dinner in the home of Simon who had a skin disease (some translations say he was a leper). Lepers had a skin disorder that was considered contagious. They were considered unclean. People were afraid of them. They were not permitted in the Temple. They were not permitted to associate with people. As they walked down the street, they would announce “unclean, unclean” so people knew to stay away. Where does Jesus choose to spend his last supper before the Last Supper? The home of a leper. Jesus touches lepers – no one did that. Jesus healed lepers – no one did that. Jesus had compassion for those others would not accept.

It makes me think of the places Jesus would be today – the hallways of hospitals, in the back of ambulances, entering rooms of people who are sick with COVID19 – the ones we're told to keep at a distance. He'd be alongside those on the front line – especially close to those without protective equipment. Jesus is drawn to such places and such people. There is no disease great enough or suffering deep enough to keep Jesus away. That's where we'd find Jesus today.

What does he tell us about kingdom living – this Hosanna living? He went to the home of a leper. It was behavior like this that put him on the cross. Who will we reach out to in the name of Christ? We've lived in our neighborhood for almost twenty years, and this past week, while walking our dog, I've met people for the first time who have lived in our neighborhood for years. Some of you have told me about baking cookies and delivering them to neighbors or buying flowers and leaving them at someone's front door. Maybe that's where our mission field could be this week. With Easter approaching, what if you left an Easter basket or a basket of cookies or a card of encouragement with this message: **If you need a message of hope in uncertain times, try this on Easter at 8:45 or 10:30.** We may not want to seem intrusive, but who doesn't need hope and encouragement today! There are persons today who are listening because of an invitation. An invitation could change someone's life. Hosanna!

Jesus was in the home of Simon the leper. While they were eating, a woman approaches Jesus with an alabaster jar. Alabaster was a kind of marble. It was beautiful and expensive, filled with expensive perfume. It was considered so valuable that it was often passed from one generation to the next as a family heirloom, used sparingly so it would last. But this woman breaks open the jar and pours the whole thing on Jesus' head. What a waste! Imagine what good it could have done if sold and used to provide food or clothing for the poor. But what Matthew wants us to see is that in this one act this woman has just anointed Jesus as king and prepared him for burial. We stand midway between Hosanna and Crucify – which will we proclaim? Jesus says, **"I tell you the truth that wherever in the whole world this good news is announced, what she's done will also be told in memory of her."** But who is she? Matthew never identifies her, because I think her anonymity is the anonymity we all share. We don't need to know her name. And she is remembered whenever we live and serve for the glory of God. And isn't that what Jesus expects of those who would be part of his kingdom?

I was sitting at my desk at home working on this message. I happened to look up at this point and noticed this picture beside my desk. It was painted by my daughter Bethany when she was 8 years old. She gave it to me on Father's Day in 1994 with a note that read "I love you Daddy." It's her self-portrait – so I would not forget what she looks like – and this is the one painting that hangs in our home that is priceless. This simple act of honoring me and saying I love you, daddy – and I will never forget.

At a dinner party where one whom the world called unclean, we see an unnamed woman whose love for Jesus overflowed – and Jesus says he will never forget. It's why I shout hosanna. God loves me so much that when I come to Jesus and say Lord I love you it brings glory to God. That's why I live – so through me others might catch a glimpse of kingdom living – I love you LORD. Hosanna!

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 5,2020

Weekly Prayer: Lord Jesus Messiah, at times I am like the healed leper, grateful for some wonderful physical blessing. Sometimes I'm like the pardoned prostitute, pouring out thanks for your mercy and love. But now and again I'm tempted to be like Judas, bitter and let down because you haven't done what I wanted. Forgive me, and keep me grateful. Amen.

Monday, April 6

Scripture: Matthew 21:12-22

Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He

said to them, "It's written, *My house will be called a house of prayer*. But you've made it a hideout for crooks." People who were blind and lame came to Jesus in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and legal experts saw the amazing things he was doing and the children shouting in the temple, "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" they were angry. They said to Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?" "Yes," he answered. "Haven't you ever read, *From the mouths of babies and infants you've arranged praise for yourself?*" Then he left them and went out of the city to Bethany and spent the night there.

Early in the morning as Jesus was returning to the city, he was hungry. He saw a fig tree along the road, but when he came to it, he found nothing except leaves. Then he said to it, "You'll never again bear fruit!" The fig tree dried up at once. When the disciples saw it, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree dry up so fast?" they asked. Jesus responded, "I assure you that if you have faith and don't doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree. You will even say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the lake.' And it will happen. If you have faith, you will receive whatever you pray for."

Observation: This week, we will examine readings from the gospel of Matthew that describe what Jesus was experiencing in the days leading up to his crucifixion and resurrection.

Following Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, he went to the Temple. Jesus was not trying to take over the Temple by force, as some interpreters suggest. Nor was he making a protest about exploitation by the money-changers and the dove-sellers, as other interpreters suggest. Instead of being regarded as the place where Israel could come to God in prayer, the Temple had come to stand for the violent longings of the "crooks" for a great revolution in which the kingdom of God would come by force. It was everything Jesus had opposed throughout his lifetime.

Application: In our time, do we sometimes use the "house of prayer" for our personal agenda, wanting God to affirm what we want, rather than coming into the sanctuary to truly seek what God wants? Take a few minutes of silence with your hands outstretched as a signal to God that you are ready to receive what God wants.

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, come. Let me be fully open and ready to receive whatever lesson you have for me this day. And in whatever I face, let me look to you for guidance and strength. Amen.

Tuesday, April 7

Scripture: Matthew 22:15-46

Then the Pharisees met together to find a way to trap Jesus in his words. They sent their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to him. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are genuine and that you teach God's way as it really is. We know that you are not swayed by people's opinions, because you don't show favoritism. So tell us what you think: Does the Law allow people to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Knowing their evil motives, Jesus replied, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used to pay the tax." And they brought him a denarion. "Whose image and inscription is this?" he asked. "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." When they heard this they were astonished, and they departed.

That same day Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Jesus. They asked, "Teacher, Moses said, *If a man who doesn't have children dies, his brother must marry his wife and produce children for his brother*. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married, then died. Because he had no children he left his widow to his brother. The same thing

happened with the second brother and the third, and in fact with all seven brothers. Finally, the woman died. At the resurrection, which of the seven brothers will be her husband? They were all married to her.” Jesus responded, “You are wrong because you don’t know either the scriptures or God’s power. At the resurrection people won’t marry nor will they be given in marriage. Instead, they will be like angels from God. As for the resurrection of the dead, haven’t you read what God told you, *I’m the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?* He isn’t the God of the dead but of the living.” Now when the crowd heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together. One of them, a legal expert, tested him. “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He replied, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.* All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

Now as the Pharisees were gathering, Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” “David’s son,” they replied. He said, “Then how is it that David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, called him Lord when he said, *The Lord said to my lord, ‘Sit at my right side until I turn your enemies into your footstool’?* If David calls him Lord, how can he be David’s son?” Nobody was able to answer him. And from that day forward nobody dared to ask him anything.

Observation: One of the Jewish leaders when Jesus was a boy was a man named Judas. He led a revolt against the oppressive taxation of Rome. The Romans crushed the revolt, leaving crosses around the countryside with dead and dying revolutionaries on them as a warning that paying the tax was compulsory, not optional. So when word spread that Jesus described a kingdom of God, people expected that such a movement would oppose Roman taxation. Surely, they thought, the whole point of God becoming king was that Caesar would not be.

Application: What did Jesus mean when he referred to the two sides of the coin? Jesus wasn’t trying to give an answer for all time on the relationship between God and political authority. He was not the sort of revolutionary that they expected. The kingdom of God would defeat the kingdom of Caesar, not by conventional means, but by the victory of God’s love and power over the even greater empire of death. The gospel of Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is fulfilling the two great commandments. They are invitations and promises to a new way of life. In the next few days, we will see this in the cross.

Prayer: O God, thank you for your grace and love that precedes my awareness of your love. Let my words and actions reflect your love as an act of worship and as an act of service to others. Amen.

Wednesday, April 8

Scripture: Matthew 26:1-16

When Jesus finished speaking all these words, he said to his disciples, “You know that the Passover is two days from now. And the Human One^[a] will be handed over to be crucified.” Then the chief priests and elders of the people gathered in the courtyard of Caiaphas the high priest. They were plotting to arrest Jesus by cunning tricks and to kill him. But they agreed that it shouldn’t happen during the feast so there wouldn’t be an uproar among the people. When Jesus was at Bethany visiting the house of Simon, who had a skin disease, a woman came to him with a vase made of alabaster containing very expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus’ head while he was sitting at dinner. Now when the disciples saw it they were angry and said, “Why this waste? This perfume could have been sold for a lot of money and given to

the poor.” But Jesus knew what they were thinking. He said, “Why do you make trouble for the woman? She’s done a good thing for me. You always have the poor with you, but you won’t always have me. By pouring this perfume over my body she’s prepared me to be buried. I tell you the truth that wherever in the whole world this good news is announced, what she’s done will also be told in memory of her.”

Then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I turn Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on he was looking for an opportunity to turn him in.

Observation: The events of the next two chapters move very quickly. We meet several people: Caiaphas, Peter, Pilate’s wife, the servant girls who point at Peter, the dark figure of Judas, and the angry blaspheming pair crucified alongside Jesus. Matthew tells the story in such a way that we can identify with at least one of them. Chapter 26 begins with the chief priests and elders. For them, Jesus’ death is a necessity. He has challenged their power and cannot be allowed to get away with it. They do not suppose for a moment that what Jesus has been saying is true.

Application: Consider your notes from last Sunday’s message which was based on verses 6-13. Jesus is in Bethany for the last supper before the Last Supper. Who is there? What do we know about Jesus from the company he keeps? The woman anoints Jesus and gives glory to God. In what ways do you give glory to God?

Prayer: God, how grateful I am for your mercy and love. Even if I feel rejected by others or look at myself as something less than what I ought to be, your acceptance is absolute. As you extend such mercy to me, let me be a similar witness to others. Amen.

Maundy Thursday, April 9

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-74

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover meal?” He replied, “Go into the city, to a certain man, and say, ‘The teacher says, “My time is near. I’m going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.”’” The disciples did just as Jesus instructed them. They prepared the Passover. That evening he took his place at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating he said, “I assure you that one of you will betray me.” Deeply saddened, each one said to him, “I’m not the one, am I, Lord?” He replied, “The one who will betray me is the one who dips his hand with me into this bowl. The Human One goes to his death just as it is written about him. But how terrible it is for that person who betrays the Human One! It would have been better for him if he had never been born.” Now Judas, who would betray him, replied, “It’s not me, is it, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You said it.”

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take and eat. This is my body.” He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many so that their sins may be forgiven. I tell you, I won’t drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Then, after singing songs of praise, they went to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Tonight you will all fall away because of me. This is because it is written, *I will hit the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will go off in all directions.* But after I’m raised up, I’ll go before you to Galilee.” Peter replied, “If everyone else stumbles because of you, I’ll never stumble.” Jesus said to him, “I assure you that, before the rooster crows tonight, you will deny me three times.” Peter said, “Even if I must die alongside you, I won’t deny you.” All the disciples said the same thing.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, "Stay here while I go and pray over there." When he took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious. Then he said to them, "I'm very sad. It's as if I'm dying. Stay here and keep alert with me." Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, "My Father, if it's possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want." He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you stay alert one hour with me? Stay alert and pray so that you won't give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak." A second time he went away and prayed, "My Father, if it's not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want." Again he came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep. But he left them and again went and prayed the same words for the third time. Then he came to his disciples and said to them, "Will you sleep and rest all night? Look, the time has come for the Human One to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let's go. Look, here comes my betrayer."

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came. With him was a large crowd carrying swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. His betrayer had given them a sign: "Arrest the man I kiss." Just then he came to Jesus and said, "Hello, Rabbi." Then he kissed him. But Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came and grabbed Jesus and arrested him. One of those with Jesus reached for his sword. Striking the high priest's slave, he cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put the sword back into its place. All those who use the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I'm not able to ask my Father and he will send to me more than twelve battle groups of angels right away? But if I did that, how would the scriptures be fulfilled that say this must happen?" Then Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come with swords and clubs to arrest me, like a thief? Day after day, I sat in the temple teaching, but you didn't arrest me. But all this has happened so that what the prophets said in the scriptures might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left Jesus and ran away.

Those who arrested Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest. The legal experts and the elders had gathered there. Peter followed him from a distance until he came to the high priest's courtyard. He entered that area and sat outside with the officers to see how it would turn out. The chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they could put him to death. They didn't find anything they could use from the many false witnesses who were willing to come forward. But finally they found two who said, "This man said, 'I can destroy God's temple and rebuild it in three days.'" Then the high priest stood and said to Jesus, "Aren't you going to respond to the testimony these people have brought against you?" But Jesus was silent. The high priest said, "By the living God, I demand that you tell us whether you are the Christ, God's Son." "You said it," Jesus replied. "But I say to you that from now on you'll see *the Human One sitting on the right side of the Almighty^[a] and coming on the heavenly clouds.*" Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He's insulting God! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, you've heard his insult against God. What do you think?" And they answered, "He deserves to die!" Then they spit in his face and beat him. They hit him and said, "Prophecy for us, Christ! Who hit you?"

Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant woman came and said to him, "You were also with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it in front of all of them, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about." When he went over to the gate, another woman saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." With a solemn pledge, he denied it again, saying, "I don't know the man." A short time later those standing there came and said to Peter, "You must be one of them. The way you talk gives you away." Then he cursed and swore, "I don't know the man!" At that very moment the rooster crowed.

Observation: Today, we begin with the account of the Last Supper. In your mind, look around the room. Who do you see? Do you see Peter furious that Jesus is still talking about dying? Do you see Thomas who is confused and not understanding most of what Jesus is saying? Do you see Judas, frozen in place, wondering how much Jesus knows? Now look to Jesus, identifying the bread with his body and the wine with his blood – inviting his followers to find in him the gift of forgiveness and new life.

Application: Join us ONLINE for worship tonight at 7:00 pm (messiahchurch.org/live) as we remember this night and find again in him these same gifts for us. Prepare by having bread and a cup of juice or water ready.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, prepare me to receive your love and forgiveness. Be real to me in the breaking of the bread. I want to sit with you at your Table and know that I am loved. Amen.

Good Friday, April 10

Scripture: Matthew 27:1-61

Early in the morning all the chief priests and the elders of the people reached the decision to have Jesus put to death. They bound him, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate the governor.

When Judas, who betrayed Jesus, saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he felt deep regret. He returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, and said, “I did wrong because I betrayed an innocent man.” But they said, “What is that to us? That’s your problem.” Judas threw the silver pieces into the temple and left. Then he went and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the silver pieces and said, “According to the Law it’s not right to put this money in the treasury. Since it was used to pay for someone’s life, it’s unclean.” So they decided to use it to buy the potter’s field where strangers could be buried. That’s why that field is called “Field of Blood” to this very day. This fulfilled the words of Jeremiah the prophet: *And I took the thirty pieces of silver, the price for the one whose price had been set by some of the Israelites, and I gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.*

Jesus was brought before the governor. The governor said, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “That’s what you say.” But he didn’t answer when the chief priests and elders accused him. Then Pilate said, “Don’t you hear the testimony they bring against you?” But he didn’t answer, not even a single word. So the governor was greatly amazed.

It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. 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?” He knew that the leaders of the people had handed him over because of jealousy. 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.” But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and kill Jesus. The governor said, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” “Barabbas,” they replied. Pilate said, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Crucify him!” But he said, “Why? What wrong has he done?” They shouted even louder, “Crucify him!” 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.” All the people replied, “Let his blood be on us and on our children.” Then he released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus whipped, then handed him over to be crucified.

The governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the governor’s house, and they gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a red military coat on him. 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!" After they spit on him, they took the stick and struck his head again and again. 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.

As they were going out, they found Simon, a man from Cyrene. They forced him to carry his cross. When they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Skull Place, they gave Jesus wine mixed with vinegar to drink. But after tasting it, he didn't want to drink it. After they crucified him, they divided up his clothes among them by drawing lots. They sat there, guarding him. They placed above his head the charge against him. It read, "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." They crucified with him two outlaws, one on his right side and one on his left. Those who were walking by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads 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." In the same way, the chief priests, along with the legal experts and the elders, were making fun of him, saying, "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. He trusts in God, so let God deliver him now if he wants to. He said, 'I'm God's Son.'" The outlaws who were crucified with him insulted him in the same way.

From noon until three in the afternoon the whole earth was dark. 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?" After hearing him, some standing there said, "He's calling Elijah." One of them ran over, took a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a pole. He offered it to Jesus to drink. But the rest of them said, "Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." Again Jesus cried out with a loud shout. Then he died. Look, the curtain of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split, and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised. After Jesus' resurrection they came out of their graves and went into the holy city where they appeared to many people. 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." Many women were watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to serve him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

That evening a man named Joseph came. He was a rich man from Arimathea who had become a disciple of Jesus. He came to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission to take it. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had carved out of the rock. After he rolled a large stone at the door of the tomb, he went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting in front of the tomb.

Observation: In these chapters, we see varying levels of remorse: the remorse of Judas; the genuine repentance of Peter for his denials of Jesus; the chief priests and elders with no remorse at all; the Roman soldiers who belittle and mock. But Jesus' innocence is the key to Matthew's meaning. How could this be happening to Jesus? Jesus is leading the way he had spoken about from the beginning, the way of being God's true Israel, the light of the world. That light now shines in the darkness – and even the darkness cannot extinguish his light.

Application: Worship with us ONLINE tonight at 7:30 in a time of prayer, reflection, and scripture. Join us if you can. Take some time to reflect on the cross. What is the significance of the cross for you?

Prayer: Let the words of the hymn be your prayer:
When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died;

my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Holy Saturday, April 11

Scripture: Matthew 27:62-66

The next day, which was the day after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate. They said, "Sir, we remember that while that deceiver was still alive he said, 'After three days I will arise.' Therefore, order the grave to be sealed until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people, 'He's been raised from the dead.' This last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate replied, "You have soldiers for guard duty. Go and make it as secure as you know how." Then they went and secured the tomb by sealing the stone and posting the guard.

Observation: Although the chief priests were active in the process that led to Jesus' crucifixion, the Pharisees had nothing to do with Jesus' trial and death. They now reappear in this clear attempt to prove that Jesus was wrong to expect that God would raise him from the dead. This scene sets the stage for what we will hear tomorrow when Mary comes to the tomb.

Application: Jesus spent his life serving others. Who are the people who serve you and how does their service bless you? Often we are blessed by people whose names you will never know and faces you will never see. Choose one person to thank today. Write a note (or email) of appreciation. In what ways can you show Jesus' love by serving others? Let God guide you in serving others, as Jesus has served you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I am often anxious about our world, and about my life circumstances. You know how these days of uncertainty weigh heavy on my heart. Despite everything, though, help me to feel your peace. Let this be the peace that "passes all understanding" that comes from your Holy Spirit. Thank you for that gift. Amen.