**Behold Your King Matthew 21:1-9**

How fickle we sinners are. Today, we stand with the crowds on the road to Jerusalem and shout and sing, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 21:9) But do we really mean it? I ask this question because in four short days, with Judas, we will betray our Lord with a kiss, and in five days, we will stand with the crowds and shout, “Crucify Him!” (Matt. 27:22-23) Then we will follow Jesus to Golgotha, the Place of a Skull, and while He endure the agony of the Cross, we will hurl insults at Him.

And what will the Son of God do to us in repayment for our fickleness? What will the King of kings do to repay our treachery? What will Jesus do to repay our cruel hatred and sin? He will give up His Spirit to His Father in heaven and die. He will repay hatred with love, fickleness and treachery with faithfulness, sin with purity, guilt with righteousness. His Blood will “be on us and our children.” (Mat. 27:25)

You are probably thinking, “There goes Pastor again, telling us we had a hand in the betrayal and death of Jesus, when our great, great, grandparent were not even born yet – much less us. Besides, if I had been there, it would have been different with me. You would never have found me standing with the crowds crying out for Jesus’ blood.”

Yeah! Right! We need to be honest at this point, especially with ourselves. What makes you think that you would have reacted any differently than everyone else in the crowd that day? Are you saying that you would have been wiser and more faithful than Jesus’ own disciples? These men who spent three years with Him, who intimately knew Him, who ate, drank, and walked with Him…who considered Him teacher and friend…failed Him that day. None of them testified on His behalf before the Sanhedrin, nor before Pontius Pilate. To a man, they all ran away and abandoned Him.

If your life or that of a loved one were in danger because of your Christian faith, would you die with the confession of Christ on your lips? Would you give up everything, forsaking even your mother and father, your sons and daughters, for your confession of Jesus Christ?

If you claim that you would, then why is it your practice to say that there are two things you do not discuss in polite company - politics and religion? Why, then, do you fail to speak boldly about Christ to your neighbor and relatives? Why haven’t you called upon your neighbors who are members of this congregation and told them that you miss them, that they are in danger of losing their eternal life because they are not having their faith fed?

With the safer-at-home dictate and social distancing, you have plenty of time to call them and talk with them. Encourage them to join us when the doors are fully open again, and we gather in groups larger than ten. Or invite them to join you now… hear the sermons posted on Zion’s Facebook page… have them read the devotions shared there. With the fear and anxiety of this era of life with COVID-19, God’s Word of comfort, peace, and hope is a message even our enemies need to hear.

Shamefully, we are all more like St. Peter than we like to admit. Scripture tells us that he denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. How many times have you denied Jesus? How many times have you neglected to speak up when your faith was put to the test? How many times have you been too frightened or too embarrassed to tell the good news about Jesus when the time to defend Him presented itself?

No one is truly innocent of Jesus’ blood, not you…not me...not anyone. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5, NKJV) Make no mistake; it was for our sin that Jesus died. It was our sin that caused Jesus’ blood to be shed. Now that your guilt is fully exposed, it is time to pay even closer attention.

We are in the middle of what the Church has traditionally called the season of Passiontide. So named because this is the time in the Church year when we most concentrate on the meaning of Jesus’ suffering and death—His “Passion.”

This is not passion as the world has come to know it. It is not lust, nor is it the emotional pull of heart-strings that we might feel as we replay the events of Holy Week. Jesus’ suffering and death are called His “*Passion”* because it is His overwhelming love and His passion to save you – me – us, which drove Him to His Cross.

When we Christians use the word, “*Passion,”* in reference to Christ, we are referring to Jesus’ suffering and death, which was driven by a love so intense that it would not let go of us. Jesus’ “*Passion”* is a love so great that He gave up everything, even His own life, to make us children of God.

The penalty for the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, is death. There is no way around it. (Genesis 2:16-17) “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) That is the Law, and that Law cannot be broken. There is a debt to pay. You must die. But it is a debt we cannot pay ourselves, so God sent His only Son, whom He loved, to pay the debt for us. Jesus submitted to the will of God. He suffered the wrath of God in your stead, in my place, and in His crucifixion, He breathed His last, and died.

Jesus died to give you, life. Our king died for us because He loved the unlovable. He died for those who hated Him, betrayed Him, and murdered Him. Jesus died despite the hatred, despite being betrayed by those He loved… despite our fickle hearts and treachery.

More to the point, He really died ***because*** of it. Jesus died that we might live. This is His passion: to take on the guilt and sin of the world—to take on our sin—and die an agonizing death reserved for only the most heinous of criminals. Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us and endured our punishment. (2 Corinth. 5:21) Jesus was forsaken by His and He died, that God would not forsake you. Your king paid the debt of death that you owe. Justice has been done.

Behold your King! His blood in the waters of Baptism seals your adoption as children of God.

Behold your King! His blood, the same blood which dripped as sweat in Gethsemane, which stained the centurion’s spear, the blood that His broken heart ceased to pump; this blood marks the doorposts of your heart — sprinkled there in the Word of absolution and in the Word of the Gospel coming to you even now.

Behold your King! His blood, the same blood which stained the ground crimson beneath His cross, is poured upon your tongue. As it pours forth from the Chalice over your tongue, it flows into your heart. With His blood, His life is poured into you and death passes over you.

Jesus passion is about His love and the lengths to which your King has gone to rescue you from death. While there is understandably some feeling of guilt about as the story of His life, suffering, and death is read there should even more be thankfulness and joy. All that Jesus did, He did to remove guilt and the stain of sin. He did it to bind up hearts, and bestow joy.

Jesus laid down His life of His own accord, nobody took it from Him! Then, He took it up again. Jesus knew what He was doing and He did it to set you free. Behold, your King knew the cost and gladly paid it - for you.

We now embark upon this holiest week, our most solemn celebration. We commemorate the institution of the New Testament in Jesus’ Blood, the destruction of Hell and all its power over us in His holy death, and the vindication of His Kingship on the day of His resurrection. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King. Yes, your king is coming to you; He is just and having salvation.” (Zech. 9:9, NKJV)

 Behold your King and rejoice greatly. Your King is coming to tell you, “I forgive you all your sins,” and grant you eternal life and salvation. Amen.