

Scripture Readings and Sermon

April 5, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Matthew 21:1-9 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Much of Matthew's telling of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem is the same as Luke and Mark. What is unique to Matthew is the inclusion of the donkey and the use of the term "Son of David". The inclusion of the donkey for Matthew is necessary for the Zechariah 9:9 to be fulfilled. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." When Jesus comes in, the people cry out Hosanna or "Save us!" to the "Son of David". While Mark proclaims "the kingdom of our father David is coming" and Luke as well as John use the word "King", Matthew uses the term "Son of David". By calling Jesus the "Son of David", Matthew is pointing to the promise of God to David found in 2 Samuel 7:12-14, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me."

Commentary on Philippians 2:5-11 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

This early hymn of the church also served as an early statement of faith. Christians profess that Jesus is fully divine and fully human. This claim of Jesus' full divinity means that Jesus was not created by God but was through the Trinity in fact God. As Philippians says he was in the "form of God" and equal with God. And yet, in the midst of his full divinity, Jesus was also fully human "in human form" and subject to a human death. This is the mystery of the "incarnation" where we claim that God is with us in Jesus. God experienced the extent of human suffering on the cross. God who is infinite experienced mortal suffering in Jesus. Once God was done with this human form, God did not discard the humanity of Jesus but raised the human form to heaven in the mystery of the "ascension". The woundedness of humanity in the marks of the nails is now part of God in Jesus. It is through Jesus' humanity that all of humanity may enter into God's glory. This is why the name of Jesus is so revered. Not because the name has power but because the who is named has opened the gates of heaven through his life, death, and resurrection. This sacrificial act is remembered during Passion week.

Commentary on Matthew 26:14-15, 20-25, 30, 48-54, 57, 63-68, 27:2-10, 15-21, 24-26, 39-43, 50-54 (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Second only to the Christmas story, the Passion story is one of the best known Christian stories. There are, however, slight differences in each of the Gospels. These differences reveal aspects of the story that the writer wants their readers to notice. The selected readings include these unique passages while skipping the passages common in other stories. For Matthew, there are three aspects that are given more attention than in the other gospels: Judas, the dream of Pilate's wife, and "Messiah, Son of God". Verses 26:14, 25, 50, and 27:3-10 are unique to Matthew and focus on Judas. Matthew has Judas requesting a reward for turning in Jesus (30 pieces of silver), Judas calling Jesus "Rabbi", Jesus calling Judas "Friend", and Judas killing himself when the full weight of his betrayal hits him. Unique to Matthew is the story of Pilate's wife warning Pilate not to condemn Jesus (27:19) and Pilate washing his hands of guilt (27:24). This lays the blood of Jesus firmly on the Jewish authorities. The term "the Messiah, Son of God" is used by Caiaphas in verse 63 during Jesus' trial. Those spitting at him will call him "Messiah" (26:68) and Pilate will also call him the "Messiah" rather than "King of the Jews" found in Luke and Mark. On the cross, the people will mock him, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." and "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am

God's Son." After the earthquake and the resurrection of the saints found only in Matthew, the centurion will proclaim "Truly this man was God's Son!"

Sermon "Save Us!" (*Sermon Video*)

The four gospels are not simply historical accounts of the life of Jesus but they also give specific communities glimpses into that life that hold words of grace for that community. This is why the gospels emphasize different accounts of Jesus' life. As John say, there are not enough books to hold all the things that Jesus said and did. The selected readings from Matthew's account of the triumphal entry and the passion contain aspects of the event that Matthew thought his community needed to hear. There is a chance that we need to hear that same message today.

Like all the gospels, Matthew has the crowd yelling "Hosanna" which means "save us". They are not, however, crying out to the King or to the kingdom of David but to the "Son of David". Matthew will repeatedly use the terms "Son of David/Man" and "Son of God". When the people cry out "Son of David", they are crying out to the man who feed the hungry and cured the sick. They are crying out to the man named Jesus to lead them. They are focused on the miracles and not the message.

In times like these, there are many people who are crying out to God to save them from hardship and illness. The truth, however, is that in the midst of life we are always in death. We exist in frail and mortal bodies that can just as easily die from COVID19 as from a car accident or an accidental fall. It turns out that my wife died of idiomatic (cause unknown) acute hemorrhagic pancreatitis – in other words her pancreas ruptured with no warning and very low chance of survival even with hospitalization. Death can happen at anytime. To ask God to save us from mortal death is to ask to be immortal. God eases suffering and remains with us during our darkest trials but God does not save us from being human or for that matter from life. Life is both night and day, winter and spring, Good Friday and Easter morning. Jesus knew this full well when he enter the city on Palm Sunday.

Like the crowd, Judas focused on regime change and physical salvation. Instead of seeing Jesus as the Messiah, Judas in Matthew refers to Jesus as "Rabbi" or teacher. His failure to understand led to the events of the crucifixion. Jesus, however, did not reject him but rather called him "Friend" even when he was being betrayed. The great tragedy of Judas was that he never fully understood what Jesus had come to save. If he had, he would not have killed himself.

The sad thing is that the Jewish leaders didn't get it either. They knew the term "Son of God" and "Messiah" but they didn't really believe it. Being religious leaders had cause them to loss their faith. Religion was something you did and not what you believed in your core. Those on the outside saw – Pilate, his wife, and even the centurion. But those who were "priests" and "scholars of God's word" were blind to the truth. The truth that God's kingdom is first spiritual and then physical. The created world is an outward and visible sign of a deeper inward and spiritual truth. Humanity may think that they rule the world but we exist within the kingdom of God.

Repent, believe, the kingdom of God is at hand. This was the message of Jesus. All the parables and miracles were done to point to this simple truth. Jesus came to save our souls. This is what it meant to be the Messiah, the Son of God. It meant that through Jesus, our relationship with God was healed and our loneliness was over. Death of the mortal body is no longer the end for our souls will be with God. The One who made us not only holds but will resurrect us. As Paul say, how this will be is a mystery but with God all things are possible. This is the foundation of our faith. COVID19 nor the cross can kill our souls for we have been saved by Jesus. The body may end but life continues. God's love will always make a way even during Holy Week or a pandemic.