

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota  
 Palm Sunday

John 12:12-27  
 John 19:16b-22  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 March 25, 2018

### **KIDS' MESSAGE**

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter – Today?

### **ADULT MESSAGE**

It happened 2,000 years ago. You know the story. Jesus, the **divine Son of God**, also the **human son of Mary** was about to die. Jesus knew it. He told his friends. He chose to let it happen. In today's Gospel texts, we hear about **Bethsaida** in Galilee, **Jerusalem** in Judah, **Rome** in Italy. What Jesus did in that distant place, Jesus also did for **Aitkin** in Aitkin County, **St. Paul** in Minnesota, **and Washington D.C.** in the United States of America.

The earthly rulers were **Pontius Pilate** the Roman governor in Jerusalem, **Herod** the puppet king of Israel and **Tiberius Caesar** the emperor of the whole Roman Empire. However, Jesus' death on that ancient cross also has something to do with **Mark Dayton**, the governor of Minnesota, **Donald Trump**, the president of the United States and **Vladimir Putin**, the president of Russia.

The sign posted on the cross over Jesus head was written in **Greek, Hebrew and Latin**. Today it could be written in **English, Spanish and Chinese**. The Roman governor had written on that sign, "**The King of the Jews.**" **Pilate** meant it as an insult to this two-bit nation of Jews. **Some king**. Nailed to a cross in the most torturous style of punishment the world had yet devised. Dying on a hillside, along the main road, where people dumped their garbage and where opponents of the Roman occupying army were killed. **Some king**. **Some Son of God**. Jesus.

So far in the Gospel of John, Jesus had brought life and hope to many of God's beloved **Jews**, and to some **Samaritans** who were so hated by the Jews. Again, and again, Jesus brought life and hope to a motley crew of sinners, tax collectors, soldiers, shepherds, prostitutes, little children, widows, beggars, sick and dying people, rich and poor people. Jesus touched the lives of **anybody who would**

**listen, of anybody who came to him for hope or help, of anybody who didn't want to go it alone any more.** You remember all the stories of Jesus caring for people. And on this ancient day, some distant **Greeks** came to see Jesus. The time was right. Now the whole world was beginning to know. **The God who is love has come among us.**

After all of that love and caring, forgiveness and healing, hope and good news shared, can you imagine how Jesus must have felt? He knew what was going to happen. He knew about the **treachery, lies and political intrigue** that the Jewish religious leaders would live out. He knew about the **power of the Roman Empire** to blot out anybody who did not bow down and worship Caesar. He knew about the **betrayal, denial and cowardice** that his hand-picked disciples would live out. Jesus knew the very people he came to save would, within hours be shouting, **"Crucify! Crucify!"** as whips lashed his body, as spikes were driven into his wrists and ankles.

You heard what Jesus said after his triumphal, kingly entry into Jerusalem. Some king, riding on a donkey and worshiped by rag-tag, everyday people. Before the palm branches and robes had been cleared off the streets, Jesus reflected. **"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour."** Do you hear it? Jesus said, **"This is why I came** – to **die** for them, to **rise again** for them, to **love and forgive** and **never give up on them**, to **never abandon them**, to **give them life** and **hope** and **newness every day** and **forever**. **This is why I came**. To die.

You remember, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."** (John 3:16-17) You remember, **"salvation"** means living in a **love/trust relationship with God**, and in a **love/caring relationship** with the **people** around us and the **whole creation**. Salvation means **"wholeness/healing."** And Jesus said, **"This is why I came."**

For **Aitkin**, for **Mark Dayton**, for **Donald Trump**, for the **world**.

Jesus is here for **Doris Polkinghorne**, age 100, Aicota Nursing Home, who prays almost non-stop, **“Lord, please help me to come home and be with you.”** And her time is close. I told Doris, **“This Easter is for you.”** And it is for:

- **Nedra and Josh Henline** as they bring a beautiful new little person into God’s world and into God’s family of faith.
- **Scott Skinner, Pat Volkman, Ladd Hakes, Gordy Pasell and Darrell Pedersen** who are battling our hated enemy, cancer.
- **Wes Wilmo** as he celebrates 80 years of life, love and joy in this world.
- **Richard Jackman, Bill Bredeesen and Kally Martinson** who are in the hospital.
- **Jan Gardner** as she uses her beautician gifts to make our nursing home friends look good and feel good about themselves.

And Jesus said, **“This is why I came.”**

- For **Silas Berg** who is maintaining U.S. Army helicopters in South Korea.
- The **two young men** from our parish who are in prison.
- The **families of the children** who have been **gunned down** at school.
- **All of our teens** who are practicing their skills for the **new athletic seasons** soon to begin, getting ready for the **musical**, and as they **learn more and more** about God’s amazing world and the people in it.
- The **families of the gang members** and **innocent bystanders** who have been killed.
- **Dr. Tom Lawson** as he battles all of the diseases and human self-neglect that trouble our lives and world.

And Jesus said, **“This is why I came.”**

- For all those who are in the **strangle hold of one addiction** or another.
- **Our own children** who face **bullying**. Or whose **families struggle**.
- **Our own teens** who face **temptations** to use drugs, alcohol or tobacco in unhealthy ways. Our teens who daily have to decide whether to **be accepted** by their peers or to **stand alone /speak in defense** of whoever is being cut down by the crowd at the moment.

- For **Ed Anderson, Wendy Mack** and **Barb Bendson** who have lost their moms during the past few days.

I sat in my rocking chair, gazing out our living room window as the eastern sky began to brighten with orange. I was up at 6:00 a.m. to try to finish my sermon before heading off to Aitkin and a busy Saturday. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday were filled with meetings, visits and catch-up for having been on vacation. Saturday morning was a familiar scene - **both** the **amazing sunrise** and my **dilemma**. Lots of thoughts and notes, but no sermon. Not much time left before I have to preach. This was the prayer I breathed. **“What shall I tell them, Lord?”** God’s answer came to me a few minutes later as my wife, Jennifer, prayed over our boiled eggs and sausage breakfast. I heard God say, **“Tell them ‘This is why I came.’”**

Think now, please, of one person you know, **who, right now, could use a full measure of faith and trust** in our **loving, forgiving, healing God**. Think of that person, or maybe it is you, yourself. . . **the person who needs to love and trust God**. . . And Jesus says **“This is why I came.”** For you. For all of you. For all of them. **This is why I came**. Easter, 2018. Jesus. For you. For all of us. It doesn’t matter where you are, or what earthly ruler, bully, disease or evil **seems to be in charge**. As long as we remember, **Jesus, who loved us to the death and back again is here for us right now. And will be forever. And that’s more than enough**. Thanks be to God. Amen.