

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

We began today much as it happened on that first Palm Sunday — at least, that’s the intent. Like the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, we have welcomed Him into our Holy Week celebration with palm branches in hand, saying our hosannas — save now — to “our Redeemer, King” (LSB442). We’ve gathered here as adoring believers as that first crowd was, for they knew that He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and many were “*believing in Jesus*” (John 12:11); that’s what Jesus’ signs were meant to do.

And yet, several days later, as the Day of Unleavened Bread arrived, Jesus was surrounded not by adoring crowds, but by a betrayer — “*Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them*” ... “*woe to that man by whom [the Son of Man] is betrayed*”

by a denier — “*Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.’*” “*Woman, I do not know him.*” “*Man, I am not [one of His disciples].*” “*Man, I do not know what you are talking about.*” “*And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.*”

by narcissists — “*A dispute also arose among [the twelve], as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.*”

by conspirators — “*the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death*”; “*And [the chief priests and officers] were glad, and agreed to give [Judas] money*”;

by liars — “*We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar*” when only days before Jesus had said, “*render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s*” (Luke 20:25); and Matthew records, “*the whole council [was] seeking false testimony against Jesus*” and “*many false witnesses came forward,*” including two who “*said, ‘This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days’*” (Matt. 26:59-61).

by sadists — “*the [High Priest’s] men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him*”; “*Herod with his soldiers treated [Jesus] with contempt and mocked him.*” Roman soldiers “*crucified [Jesus],*” and they “*also mocked him.*” Even one of the criminals being justly punished for their crimes “*railed at [Jesus].*”

by cowards — Matthew and Mark both tell us that the disciples “*all forsook [Jesus] and fled*” (Mark 14:50);

and by a cowardly governor — “*I find no guilt in this man.*” “[*Pilate*] *sent him over to Herod*”; “*nothing deserving death has been done by him*”; “*Pilate [desired] to release Jesus*”; “*I have found in him no guilt deserving death.*” But finally, “*Pilate decided that their demand should be granted.*” “*he delivered Jesus over to their will*” to be crucified.

Both friend and foe are in this rabble of manifest sinners who contributed to Jesus’ demise on the cross. It was as it had to be. Others were crucified along side Him, but no one else could bear the burden that Jesus bore; no one else could carry the sins of this degenerate group of people, nor the sins of those who went before them, nor the sins of us who have come after them; no one else could bear the awful wrath of God for this sin; no one else but Jesus; no one else but He, God’s own Son, who came down from the Father’s side, humbling Himself to take on a servant’s form — becoming mortal; no one else than He would die for ungodly sinners like us, for even God’s enemies.

Paul reminds us, “*one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:7-8). This was the Father’s will for man after he sinned, that he might be saved by the offspring of woman, by the bruising of His heel. And so this Son of God and Mary’s son did. He obeyed God “*to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” Thus was His heel bruised as He crushed the serpent’s head and destroyed the power of death.

For through Jesus’ death, we are reconciled to God; but more than that, through faith in Him we are reckoned no longer among the betrayers, or deniers, or narcissists, or conspirators, or liars, or sadists, or cowards, but among the saved and the living, among those who rejoice that God highly exalted Jesus on the third day. We are numbered among those who do not dread Holy Week or Good Friday, but who exult to say today, “All glory, laud, and honor, to You, Redeemer King,” and to confess, “*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.