

Date Preached	10-Apr-2022	Date Initiated	29-Mar-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Palm/Passion Sun, Yr C

" 'Not my will but *yours* be done.' "



How does it all go so wrong ... and so *quickly*? The seemingly triumphal entry of a victor turns vicious, almost overnight. The crowd's adulation almost immediately becomes animus: "Hosanna"s hammered into "Hang Him!" A religious establishment that's been wary-but-passive until now ↓ suddenly springs into treacherous action.¹ A civil governor whose initial instinct for justice and moderation soon succumbs to a mob's tyranny and his own desperation to keep Rome's peace. A ragged but stalwart band of work-a-day disciples melts away as their beloved leader calmly walks to His own death. And just like that the Messiah ... the Son of Man-and-Son of God: solemnly promised and eagerly expected for centuries ... dies a gruesome and torturous death upon a cross in a matter of a few scant hours.² How does it all go so *horrifically* wrong?

Does God lack the *power* to stop it? No, this is the same Jesus Who walks on water ... feeds thousands with food enough for a family ... exorcises demons and restores the sight of the blind ... raises Lazarus from the dead.

Does God lack the *strength* or *resolve* to stop this slaughter? No, this is the same Jesus Who halts the fracas in the Garden and restores the severed ear of His assailant's slave ... excoriates the leaders who are misruling God's own people ... preaches turning the other cheek.

Does God not *care*? No, this is the same Jesus Who, time and again, welcomes little children to His side ... heals the solitary hemorrhaging woman in the midst of a thronging crowd ... revives Jairus' dead daughter as people laugh and sneer in derisive disbelief ... tenderly washes His disciples' feet like a servant the night before He dies.

Have the powers-that-be somehow *duped* or *outwitted* God? No, this is the same Jesus Who shrewdly tells the Pharisees³ to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's ... knows why evil spirits understand Who He is—and why the people in His own hometown do not ... teaches parables so layered and nuanced that, some two thousand years on, we still unravel them anew each time we encounter them.

So what, then, *is* the explanation for this travesty? If Jesus is powerful enough—in fact, omnipotent; strong enough—in fact, the Source of all creation's strength; caring enough—in fact, the font of all charity; and smart enough—in fact, omniscient ... to avoid this ignominious end ... this disgraceful deposition of a pretender king ... this final comeuppance of a misfit with a Messiah complex ... then *why doesn't He*? Why doesn't He overrule human reason, dispel human prejudice ... and *reign*? Why doesn't He erect His throne, place His rightful crown on His head and declare that

¹ So deep is the irony that in their being so convinced they know God's *intent* that they're blind to God's *actual presence*, right in their very midst.

² Indeed, the Crucifixion is over surprisingly quickly. The soldiers assigned to break Jesus' legs in St John's account (19:31-33) are given the order to hasten His death because crucifixion was (on purpose) an agonizingly slow way to die. But when they come to Jesus, they discover He has already died. (It's also thought that Pilate wanted to make sure Jesus was actually dead, lest his followers 'fake' a resurrection by removing Him from the Cross while He was still alive.)

³ *I.e.*, in St Mark and St Matthew's telling of this episode.

while death may be the lot of the lowly creature, its powers find no purchase when confronting the Creator King?

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There *is* an explanation. There *is* a reason God cycles us back to stare at Calvary each year ... and it is a simple one. But in its simplicity, also profoundly divine. To begin to understand it, we must first stop rooting around for explanations in the grab-bag of earthly conceits that define *our* lives—power and strength; intelligence and cunning—and, instead, look down upon the Cross, from above—from *God's* perspective. For from God's point-of-view, the Cross is *victory*, not defeat; is *grace*, not evil; is *glory*, not shame; is *culmination*, not calamity. For God, the Cross is *love*.

Since almost the first moments of Creation—from Adam and Eve's first bite of that apple in the Garden—humanity's relationship with God has been twisted and perverted and well nigh destroyed⁴ by our own sinfulness. God created us in a circularity of love: for God to be in love with us, and us to be in love with God. But so long as our / loving / God depended upon the exercise of our free will—our conscious decision to place God above all else—the circle remained broken: God's will thwarted by our endless pursuit of earthly prizes—shiny but cheap. This is one of the through-lessons of the Old Testament: the story of humanity in love with everything *but* God, even as God tries everything to bend our wills Godward.

In Jesus' *birth* we had the beginning of the end of the Old Testament story: Moved by pity for our constant warping of the circle of God's love, ↓ the Father sends His Only Son into the world, to clothe God's divinity with all of humanity's faults and flaws. And now, in Jesus' *death*, we come to the *end* of the Old Testament story: Both All-God and All-Man, Jesus dies to destroy sin's power to come between us and God—to prevent our sinfulness from ever again breaking the circle of love that holds God and us in perfect relationship. Jesus dies a public death not in humiliation ... but to proclaim a new and indissoluble bond between heaven and earth. He suffers a cruel death not in punishment ... but as a token of the limitlessness of God's care for us. He hangs, and dies, upon the Cross not as torture ... but as triumph: as the triumph of God's desire that nothing humanity is capable of devising or devolving-to will ever again "be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39).

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Let no one tell you the Cross is either an accident or, for all its heinous ugliness, a tragedy. Reject as false any notion that Calvary represents the victory of finite human ends over the indomitable will or illimitable love of God. We assert in vain any explanation for the Crucifixion that's grounded in divine failure or weakness ... or in human betrayal or rejection or blindness. No, the Cross is the graciously ordained fate of Christ⁵ from the moment the angel announces to Mary that she will bear a Son and name him Jesus—"Savior" (Luke 1); and it is the even *more* graciously ordained fate of humanity: that through our Savior's death, we are forever redeemed, restored and rè-plàcèd in the infinite circle of God's most merciful love.



⁴ Although, I believe, God would never have allowed its complete destruction.

⁵ We hear this from Jesus' own lips: all of His repeated, if misunderstood (or looked-past), predictions of His own Death—murder, in fact—and Resurrection throughout the gospels.

*The Rev Douglas S Worthington
St Andrew's Parish
Kent, CT*