

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday Sunday, March 25, 2018

The Collect: Almighty and ever living God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Isaiah 50:4-9a read from the Modern English Version Bible

The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I may know how to sustain him who is weary with a word; He awakens me morning by morning; He awakens my ear to listen as the learned. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn back. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out my beard; I did not cover my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore, I shall not be disgraced; therefore, I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He who vindicates me is near; who will contend with me? Let us stand up to each other. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Certainly the Lord God will help me; who is he who condemns me?

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 31:9-16 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

9 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; * my eye is consumed with sorrow, and also my throat and my belly.

10 For my life is wasted with grief, and my years with sighing; * my strength fails me because of affliction, and my bones are consumed.

11 I have become a reproach to all my enemies and even to my neighbors, a dismay to those of my acquaintance; * when they see me in the street they avoid me.

12 I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; * I am as useless as a broken pot.

13 For I have heard the whispering of the crowd; fear is all around; * they put their heads together against me; they plot to take my life.

14 But as for me, I have trusted in you, O Lord. * I have said, "You are my God.

15 My times are in your hand; * rescue me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.

16 Make your face to shine upon your servant, * and in your loving-kindness save me."

Epistle: Philippians 2:5-11 read from the New American Standard Bible

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: Mark 15: 1 – 47 read from the New Century Version Bible

Very early in the morning, the leading priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, and all the Jewish council decided what to do with Jesus. They tied him, led him away, and turned him over to Pilate, the governor.

Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus answered, "Those are your words."

The leading priests accused Jesus of many things. So Pilate asked Jesus another question, "You can see that they are accusing you of many things. Aren't you going to answer?"

But Jesus still said nothing, so Pilate was very surprised.

Every year at the time of the Passover the governor would free one prisoner whom the people chose. At that time, there was a man named Barabbas in prison who was a rebel and had

committed murder during a riot. The crowd came to Pilate and began to ask him to free a prisoner as he always did.

So Pilate asked them, "Do you want me to free the king of the Jews?" Pilate knew that the leading priests had turned Jesus in to him because they were jealous. But the leading priests had persuaded the people to ask Pilate to free Barabbas, not Jesus.

Then Pilate asked the crowd again, "So what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?"

They shouted, "Crucify him!"

Pilate asked, "Why? What wrong has he done?"

But they shouted even louder, "Crucify him!"

Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he freed Barabbas for them. After having Jesus beaten with whips, he handed Jesus over to the soldiers to be crucified.

The soldiers took Jesus into the governor's palace (called the Praetorium) and called all the other soldiers together. They put a purple robe on Jesus and used thorny branches to make a crown for his head. They began to call out to him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" The soldiers beat Jesus on the head many times with a stick. They spit on him and made fun of him by bowing on their knees and worshiping him. After they finished, the soldiers took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him out of the palace to be crucified.

A man named Simon from Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was coming from the fields to the city. The soldiers forced Simon to carry the cross for Jesus. They led Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the Place of the Skull. The soldiers tried to give Jesus wine mixed with myrrh to drink, but he refused. The soldiers crucified Jesus and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing lots to decide what each soldier would get.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified Jesus. There was a sign with this charge against Jesus written on it: the king of the jews. They also put two robbers on crosses beside Jesus, one on the right, and the other on the left. And the Scripture came true that says, "They put him with criminals." People walked by and insulted Jesus and shook their heads, saying, "You said you could destroy the Temple and build it again in three days. So save yourself! Come down from that cross!"

The leading priests and the teachers of the law were also making fun of Jesus. They said to each other, "He saved other people, but he can't save himself. If he is really the Christ, the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross. When we see this, we will believe in him." The robbers who were being crucified beside Jesus also insulted him.

At noon the whole country became dark, and the darkness lasted for three hours. At three o'clock Jesus cried in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani." This means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

When some of the people standing there heard this, they said, "Listen! He is calling Elijah."

Someone there ran and got a sponge, filled it with vinegar, tied it to a stick, and gave it to Jesus to drink. He said, "We want to see if Elijah will come to take him down from the cross."

Then Jesus cried in a loud voice and died.

The curtain in the Temple was torn into two pieces, from the top to the bottom. When the army officer who was standing in front of the cross saw what happened when Jesus died, he said, "This man really was the Son of God!"

Some women were standing at a distance from the cross, watching; among them were Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph. (James was her youngest son.) These women had followed Jesus in Galilee and helped him. Many other women were also there who had come with Jesus to Jerusalem.

This was Preparation Day. (That means the day before the Sabbath day.) That evening, Joseph from Arimathea was brave enough to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus' body. Joseph, an important member of the Jewish council, was one of the people who was waiting for the kingdom of God to come. Pilate was amazed that Jesus would have already died, so he called the army officer who had guarded Jesus and asked him if Jesus had already died. The officer told Pilate that he was dead, so Pilate told Joseph he could have the body. Joseph bought some linen cloth, took the body down from the cross, and wrapped it in the linen. He put the body in a tomb that was cut out of a wall of rock. Then he rolled a very large stone to block the entrance of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw the place where Jesus was laid.

The Gospel of the Lord

The Closing Prayer: On March 26th we remember Richard Allen, first Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Read from *A Great Cloud of Witnesses*.

Richard Allen was born into slavery in 1760 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Allen, his parents, and his siblings were eventually sold to owner Stokely Sturgis, whose plantation was in Delaware. The Methodists were already active in Delaware, and Sturgis allowed Allen to attend church. At the age of 17, Richard underwent a classic conversion experience: "I cried to the Lord both day and night," Allen said. "All of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and, glory to God, I cried."

Allen brought members of the Methodist Church into his master's home, where Sturgis heard a sermon by the great Methodist preacher Freeborn Garrettson. Sturgis was himself converted, and he allowed Allen to hire himself out and purchase his freedom; five years later, Richard Allen was a free man.

In 1786, Allen became a preacher at St. George's Methodist Church, but he was restricted to preaching at early morning services. Eventually, as black membership increased, the vestry decided to build a segregated section for black worshippers. Allen, along with his friend Absalom Jones, resented the segregation of his fellow black Christians and, in 1787, Allen and Jones led black worshippers out of St. George's in protest.

While Jones and many of those associated with him joined The Episcopal Church, Allen chose to continue in his Methodist tradition. He had been cooperating with Bishop Francis Asbury to spread Methodism among African Americans, and, in 1794, he founded Bethel Church in Philadelphia. When the newly formed African Methodist Episcopal Church declared its independence, Allen became its first Bishop.

Throughout his life, Richard Allen remained an advocate of freedom for all people, even operating a station on the Underground Railroad for escaped slaves. His ardent belief in the brotherhood of all who belonged to Christ is best expressed in one of the many hymns he wrote:

Why do they then appear so mean
And why so much despised?
Because of their rich robes unseen
The world is not appriz'd.

Bishop Allen died at home on March 26th, 1831.

Let us Pray: Loving God, who makes us all your children by adoption in Jesus Christ: May we, following the example of your servant Richard Allen, proclaim liberty to all who are enslaved and captive in this world; through Jesus Christ, Savior of all, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**