

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Well really, what more can I say?

The passion story is probably the most often heard story in the Bible.

But there is a problem with familiarity.

Sometimes we forget to listen with our ears,

and we listen with only our memory.

There are actually four different passion stories,

each a slightly different version of the death of Jesus.

As so often happens,

these four versions get blended in our memories

into one harmonized version of the story.

That's not necessarily a good thing.

The Gospels are different for a reason.

Today I thought I would briefly highlight

some of the things that make Luke's version different.

First, remember that Luke's entire Gospel is a sermon;

a sermon preached to Theophylus,

A name that means Lover of God.

As all of us here today,

at one level or another,

fall into that category,

we would do well to listen carefully to what Luke has to say.

To that end, I encourage you to spend some time with your Bible this week,

and open to the 22nd and 23rd chapters of Luke.

(What, what? Homework?)

Luke's sermon really is better than anything I could hope to preach,

and it's topic lies at the core of our faith.

So, yes, I am strongly recommending homework!

What I offer today are mere footnotes.

Points of wonder! (Pause)

First notice the Garden of Gethsemane,
or more correctly its absence.

The place that Jesus withdraws to for prayer
is here named the Mount of Olives.

As you may or may not know, the place is actually the same.

If you look on a map you will find
that Gethsemane is on the Mount of Olives.

But the name Mount of Olives
is meant, I think, to draw us back to the prophecy of Zechariah...

You may not remember it,
because we don't hear it anymore in our lectionary,
though we used to many years ago.

Clearly Luke remembered it.

It goes like this.

"...and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two
from east to west by a very wide valley;
so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward,
and the other half southward.

...On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem,
half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea;
it shall continue in summer as in winter.

And the LORD will become king over all the earth;"

It is, among other things,

Luke's way of foreshadowing the events to come.

I wonder what those other things might be? (Pause)

Before we leave the Mount of Olives, I'd like you to notice two other things.

The disciples are found sleeping because of grief,

and Jesus admonishes them

to pray that they may not come into the time of trial.

These points are unique to Luke's Gospel.

What is it that he might be trying to tell us by this event? (Pause)

As the crowd arrives

notice that it is a disciple brandishing a sword

and Judas, the betrayer, brandishing a kiss.

A miss-use of each, and Jesus forbids them both. (Pause)

I have to interrupt at this point

to say that the urge to wax on mellifluously about any one of the above points

is almost uncontrollable.

I would love nothing better than to expound on the irony of kiss and sword,

but I realize that time is a precious commodity on Palm Sunday.

There are literally hundreds of sermons lurking among these verses.

That is why I bid you open your Bible at home and see if you can find them.

Not expounding on any of them is a task almost beyond a preacher such as me.

Pray that you may not come into such a time of trial!

Let us continue!

We move on to what is called the first trial,

or should I say two trials;

The trial of Peter in the dark, and the trial of Jesus in the light.

In Peter's trial notice the gaze of Jesus, and the effect it has on Peter.

How often have we too been fixed with those eyes that see all,

and reveal all.

In Jesus' trial, notice that even though it takes place in the light of day,

the temple authorities are blind and in the dark.

In their insults,

those holding Jesus actually give him the rightful names of

Prophet, Messiah, and Son of God,
and yet still they do not see. (Pause)

On to the Roman trial.

Notice closely the person of Pilate as Luke portrays him.

Pilate, though he tries intently,
never actually finds Jesus guilty of a capital crime;
and his minions, the Roman soldiers,
throughout the passion narrative
succeed in naming him both King of the Jews,
and ultimately, innocent.

Yet still he is sentenced to death.

It is hard to imagine
why Pilate would release a known insurrectionist and murderer
in place of a man he felt was innocent,
but we have enough modern tales
of miscarriages of justice in the name of expediency
to know that this, sadly, is nothing new. (Pause)

Let us now move on to the crucifixion.

Notice that Jesus, even at the hour of his death,
continues his ministry,
prophesying to the women of Jerusalem,
forgiving those involved in the very act of his crucifixion,
and giving everlasting life to the one criminal.

Notice also that Luke's Jesus is quiet on the cross,
there is no cry of "Father, why have you forsaken me."

Notice also the women. They are everywhere in Luke's passion.

They are present at the crucifixion,
the death,
and the burial of Jesus.

In a time of history when women didn't count for much,
outside of procreation,
they have a very high profile in this story. Why might that be?
What is Luke trying to tell the people of his day?
What might he be telling us today, as well? (Pause)

Now the burial.

Here we meet an interesting character, Joseph of Arimathea.

He is named in all four Gospels as the one who claims Jesus body,
and buries it in a tomb of rock where no one had ever been laid.

In the other Gospels we hear that he is a member of the Sanhedrin,
the body that worked so hard for Jesus' death,
though he is said to have not agreed with their plans.

In Luke's Gospel he is totally absent until this incident.

Why have we not heard of him earlier?

Where was he during the trial?

His actions show his great respect and honor for Jesus,
a man just executed as a common criminal.

Is this not a cause for wonder?

On another note, it is interesting that in Luke
there is no specific mention that the tomb is sealed,
though it could be inferred later in the Gospel.

Why leave it out?

And what about the women again?

Why do they rest on the Sabbath
when by all accounts their world has been turned upside down.

Why do they not honor the dead as Joseph of Arimathea? (Pause)

These are just a few highlights of the great richness of this story.

Again I tell you, get out your own Bibles this week,
and look for your own questions

and ponder your own answers,
they are both there for the taking.

In these past few minutes I have asked a lot of questions;
questions without easy answers.

In the minutes we read the great passion narrative,
and found ourself surrounded by these powerful words.

In the week ahead
in a more liturgical way
we will again live out the passion of our Lord
and again the questions will come.

This will be a dark time for us
as we face again the reality of Christ crucified by us,
and we huddle in the courtyard with Peter
as Christ turns and gazes at us
looking into our hearts with those eyes that see everything.

But do not be afraid.

Most of God's best work is done in the dark.

In the months and years ahead there will be times of question
as we face our own times of trial.

There will surely be times of darkness ahead that must be endured.

That is the way of the life of faith.

The story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus
reminds us that when we hold to our faith,
on the other side of that darkness, the light is waiting.

Always.

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Amen.