

**Ser20-14** "Accomplice OR Active Defender?" 4-5-20 Palm sun tucc  
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Ps 118:1-2, 19-29; Phil 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-26 (Jesus and Pilate)

One thing for sure this morning, as we try to appropriate something helpful from the first Palm Sunday parade to our lives in these troubling times...we would not be having a parade in the first place, not in these days of orders to "stay at home." In the second place, in the midst of the chaos and crisis times in which we live, as much as we might want it, there are no parades for us to join. Yet there is the choice we make between being safe and at the same time following the one who gives us hope for our lives, Jesus the Christ.

In fact, that is one of the problems officials face and we face as well. Did you see the video on the news this past Monday evening with the hordes of people on the streets in New York...wanting to the USNS Comfort (hospital ship) in the New York Harbor? A crowd wanting to see comfort and hope while ignoring the social distancing guidelines that keep us safe...and give us hope and comfort.

Not unlike the crowds that day following Jesus. Not unlike the crowds wanting to find some hope for their lives. They had heard about him and his healing powers, about his compassion and love. They would risk it all to even get a glimpse of Jesus.

They also know, first hand, about the corrupt empire represented by the alternative parade in Jerusalem led by none other than Pontius Pilate, riding into Jerusalem on his big horse with soldiers all around him and his entourage of power.

Who was Pilate? Governor of Judea...Gov., comptroller, Supreme judge and commander in chief...all in one. Where did he live? Caesarea Maritima – the official palace of Pilate, between Joppa and Tel Aviv on a map in 2020. Why did Pilate come to Jerusalem? He came for the Festival of Tabernacles, just like everyone else. Pilate represented the empire with his status of wealth and authority, and like all other leaders of the empire he was a politician. He had to be concerned with his constituents, especially the religious leaders of the time.

Jesus had been telling his disciples for a long time that he had to make this trip to Jerusalem as well. At least, the disciples should have known this too...Jesus only tells them--at least three times--that we know of that he will be killed and resurrected. Three gospel writers report Jesus telling the disciples (three different times) of his death and resurrection: In Matthew, In chap. 16 before the transfiguration trip on the mountain, in chap. 17 in Galilee, and then again in chap. 20 before their trip to Jerusalem: <sup>17</sup> *While Jesus was*

*going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, <sup>18</sup> "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; <sup>19</sup> then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."*

Can we even imagine Jesus (even Jesus) knowing all this and still riding that little donkey into the City? Yes. Why? Because he is Jesus.

In Matthew's gospel, he lives out his mission to bring relief to the oppressed and hope to people. Between his entry into Jerusalem on his Palm Sunday donkey, Jesus tells a variety of parables, he denounces the religious leaders; he tells of the destruction of the temple; and in Mark's gospel, Jesus "cleanses the temple." This act of protest is seen as one of the most offensive acts he takes, at least offensive to the commerce carried out by the temple leaders. He messed with their money and they were offended, offended to the point of arresting him and bringing him before the authorities.

Of course, a lot takes place between Jesus' triumphant entry into the city and the text we read this morning in Matthew 27, verses 11-26. Most of these events occur during what we call, "Holy Week." It goes without say, in these times of worship outside of the sanctuary of Trinity church (worship at home on your own; worship online with zoom for those who have computers) trying to stay true to the flow or chronology of the events between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday is difficult. At Trinity we will hold a Maundy Thursday service on line on zoom and you will receive a mailing of a bulletin for Thursday of next week. However, we will not hold a Good Friday service.

After his arrest, he is brought before the authorities and thus we find this encounter in Matthew 27 between Jesus and Pilate. What role does Pilate play in this plot by the authorities to stop Jesus? To end Jesus ministry in the world? Is he an active accomplice to the religious leader's plot to kill Jesus or is it possible that he would defend Jesus? We know that many of Jesus' followers would want Pilate to release Jesus to them. But that's not what happens. Pilate follows a normal ritual of releasing a prisoner but not Jesus.

Did you notice, Matthew says in verse 24, <sup>24</sup> *So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood;[e] see to it yourselves."* Pilate gives in to the people and does nothing to prevent a trumped-up charge against Jesus. He washes his hands.

My friends, how do we respond to the opportunities we have, even today, April 5, 2020, to **keep our commitment to Jesus by speaking up about our faith, about the power of Jesus' presence in our lives?** How do we avoid the temptation to which Pilate gave into? ►to wash our hands of our relationship with Jesus when people push back against our faith? ►to give in to public pressure to not put our spiritual life before the world? ►to become an accomplice to those who would cast doubts upon the strength of God's love and healing in these times?

I pray you will find strength and hope and encouragement in following Jesus...even to the tragic events of his life during Holy Week. Then when we gather in the varied but limited ways we can gather in these times on April 12 and remember the ultimate outcome of God's great act of raising Jesus to new life. Maybe that be so for you and for me. Amen.

Footnote about Easter Sunday. We will send out worship materials to you for April 12, Easter Sunday. We will gather those who can worship with us on Zoom.com also. We promise you that when we do return to Trinity Church Sanctuary for our public services **we will celebrate Jesus resurrection and our resurrection together – Easter flowers and all.**