

Palm/Passion Sunday, April 1, 2012  
Communion Sunday

Mark 11:1-11, Philipians 2:5-11, Luke 19:28-40, Matthew 27:11-54

### **Witnesses to the Sacrifice**

And here we leave Jesus Christ for the week, executed on a cross, for reasons that are rather unclear, except we know that he challenged the religious establishment of his time.

He did not espouse revolution against the government. He was not trying to grab political power. He did not even suggest that people should not pay their taxes.

What he insisted on was a true and honest relationship with the one, true, living God of Israel, a relationship that was not only for people who met certain criteria or who had certain backgrounds, but a relationship that included people who were on the margins of society.

Fishermen, tax collectors, women (both those of good reputation, such as Mary and Martha, and those of ill repute, such as Mary Magdalene), children, peasants, lepers and people who were blind, people who were not Jewish.

All kinds of people were welcomed by Jesus, as long as they understood that they needed God's help and healing.

These people were the ones who were witnesses to what Jesus did--- the miracles, the healings, the teachings. Jesus drew crowds to hear him, people that came seeking his help and his wisdom. They came to be touched by God, be healed by God, to learn about God.

And so they lined the road as Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday----a great crowd shouting “Hosanna in the Highest, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”

But where were they by Thursday night, when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? They had witnessed to his identity on Sunday, waving palm branches and spreading their cloaks on the ground in front of him. By Thursday they had disappeared, gone back to wherever they had come from.

Even the apostles ran away from his arrest, not wanting to be arrested with him.

The next crowd that Jesus heard was not shouting “Hosanna.” It was shouting “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

The witnesses to the power and the divinity of Christ were nearly all gone, leaving only the Beloved Disciple, Jesus' mother and some of the other women crying helplessly as they watched Jesus die on the cross.

The crowd of witnesses to Jesus' ministry who were there to see his triumphant ride into Jerusalem on Sunday had become a handful of witnesses on Friday.

These were the only faithful witnesses to the sacrifice that Christ made that day. It was an indescribable sacrifice---an innocent man dying to save all of humankind from our own evil and sin.

But although there were only a few witnesses there that horrible day, we are also witnesses to the sacrifice. We are witnesses because we have heard the story. We have read the Gospel accounts of what happened.

We read and hear the story of Holy Week every year, and it has become more to us than a story. It is very real and powerful. More than an historical account of something that happened long before we were born, it is, for us, part of our relationship with Christ---and I would say even more than just being part of that relationship that it is the foundation for it.

Without the sacrifice of Christ, we probably would never have heard of him. If he had just continued on teaching and preaching and lived to a ripe, old age and died in his sleep, he would have been just another good, moral man, of which there have been many.

We barely know their names, but we are witnesses to Jesus' sacrifice. We remember his name!

A sacrifice that by definition could only be made by someone who had a choice, who could have escaped the cross! Others who died on Roman crosses were criminals or victims. They may even have been martyrs, but their deaths were not sacrifices.

A sacrifice is something that has been given up willingly.

Jesus' sacrifice was not only his death. His sacrifice began years before that. His sacrifice was giving up his place in heaven for a period of time. His sacrifice was taking on human flesh with all its limitations. For the first time since before the beginning, he felt hunger and pain and loneliness.

For the first time he was separated from the Creator and the Holy Spirit.

For the first time he knew sorrow when his friend Lazarus died. For the first time he was beaten and whipped and spat upon. For the first time he bled and struggled for breath and finally breath stopped altogether.

Jesus' sacrifice began on a starry night in Bethlehem and ended in a tomb on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

We are all witnesses to the truth of this. We are all witnesses to the sacrifice of Christ.

And so I ask you this morning, What difference does being a witness to all of this make in your life? Do others notice that there is anything different about you? Or are you just like everyone else in the world?

Because being a witness should make a difference! It should change you deep inside to know that Jesus Christ sacrificed everything.

And the only reason for his sacrifice is his great love for you! Not just you, but the whole world, but you need to know that he knows your name and calls you beloved. Christ loves each one of us as though there were only one of us! Christ gave up everything for you. You are a witness to that truth.

Be a witness to the world around you by the way you live. Use words when necessary!

Amen!