

Palm Sunday 2025 (13th April)

Luke 23: 1-49; Philippians 2: 5-11; Isaiah 50: 4-9a

A Sermon by Mark Willis, Lay Reader

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have just become witnesses to harrowing events culminating in the brutal killing of a young man. Perhaps just another day in the ongoing history of this brutal world, where self-interest seems to justify extreme behaviours.

Many of the people present are disappointed and angry that this man has not fulfilled the role that they expected of him. He is not a conquering hero who will stand up to the Romans, but one who instead admonishes our own behaviours and attitudes and claims to be king within a kingdom that no one has yet seen. He is a con man and deserves to be put to death.

His mother stands helpless and distraught at the foot of the cross. Throughout a most incredible series of events during the past three years, her love and faith in her son has remained steadfast. She knows that he is innocent of any transgressions against God's law and yet is being sacrificed by the very people supposed to be upholding God's law.

Who is this person on the cross? In his letter to the Philippians, Paul explains that this is our loving God, creator of the universe. What has he done? He has set aside his glory and power in the heavens to become a humble human being and walk obediently towards death upon a cross. Why would he do that? To pay the penalty for our sin so that we may be reunited with our loving God, which is the original purpose for our creation. Does he have a name? His name is Jesus, which in Hebrew means 'God Saves'.

We might now have a growing feeling of apprehension and guilt. For it is not Jesus' sin that puts him on the cross, but our sins. Here we are standing amongst the crowd holding a hammer and nails in our own hands. But doesn't Paul say that the purpose for Jesus' sacrifice is to save us?

Crucifixion is not the end of the story. The most important event in the history of mankind takes place two days later. On Easter Day God raises Jesus from death, to be granted all authority in heaven and on earth. Easter Day thereby becomes the most divisive day in the history of the world. For it is not the tools in our hands, but our

belief upon the events of Easter Day which will determine whether we will live in eternity or die.

In his letter to the Romans (10.9) Paul states 'If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'. Again, in today's letter to the Philippians, Paul reiterates that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue should declare that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

The criminal on the cross was running out of time within which to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, thereby receiving forgiveness and eternal life. Neither do we know how much longer we have ahead of us. But like the criminal, we too are in the right presence and in the right place here each week to proclaim that simple truth 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

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