

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday) [A]

Isaiah 50.4-9a

Psalm 31.9-16

Philippians 2.5-11

Matthew 26.14-27.66

The service begins with the Liturgy of the Palms, which includes Matthew 21.1-11. The themes which recur in Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem are:

1. Jerusalem is identified with Zion, as the center of the religious life of the LORD's people.
2. Jesus' foreknowledge and lordship are emphasized.
3. Matthew conflates Isaiah 62.11 and Zechariah 9.9, stressing the humility of the King who comes.
4. The "Hosanna" ("Help [or save], I pray!") cry of the crowd is part of a quotation from Ps. 118.25, 26. Nonetheless, the crowd has a "low" Christology, hailing Jesus as a prophet.

Isaiah 50.4-9a

1. The section is taken from that part of Isaiah in which the Servant speaks of his confidence as a prophet.
 - a. Our translation has the servant say that God has given him the tongue of a "teacher," but the original Hebrew word is that for "disciple"!
 - i. The point is, apparently, that those who are *disciples* of the LORD (*i.e.*, instructed by Him) must also speak for Him, to "sustain the weary".
2. Like the prophets before him, the servant is ignored and even maltreated.
 - a. The servant's face is set "like flint". This is a frequent image in prophetic literature, *cf.* Isa. 48.4; Ezek. 3.8-9; Jer. 1.8, 18.
 - b. The servant is to teach in response to the LORD's instruction, and yet this meets with resistance. Nonetheless, the servant proceeds in the strength of the LORD.

Psalm 31.9-16

1. The psalm as a whole is an individual lament. Safety and deliverance is to be found in the "hand" (keeping) of the LORD.
2. The psalmist experiences that "fear is all around" (v. 13). The original is rather stronger, "terror is on every side".
 - a. *Cf.* Jer. 20.10. The psalmist here remembers the persecution of the prophet.
 - i. Opposition to the faith and to the righteous is a perennial problem.

Philippians 2.5-11

1. The famous "Christ Hymn" is distinguished by its rhythmic character, use of parallelism (as in the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms), and by the occurrence of rare and uncharacteristic language.

- a. This has led some to believe that the hymn was written originally in Aramaic, and is older than Paul, having been composed at the very start of the Church in Jerusalem.
2. The hymn has a two fold structure, following the introduction in v. 5:
 - a. Vv. 6-8 describe Christ's abasement.
 - b. Vv. 9-11 describe His exaltation.
3. Christ was in the "form of God" (*en morphé theou*). *Morphé* denotes the essential mode of being by which the essential character or status of something is known.
 - a. Christ enjoyed a divine way of being.
4. In His exaltation, Jesus is given dominion over all. This despite His abasement to the lowest form of death, on a cross.

Matthew 26.14-27.66

1. Matthew's Passion narrative is structured as follows:
 - a. The plot to kill Jesus (26.1-5).
 - b. The anointing at Bethany (26.6-13).
 - c. Judas' agreement to betray Jesus (26.14-16).
 - d. The Passover with the disciples (26.17-25).
 - e. The institution of the Lord's Supper (26.26-30).
 - f. Peter's denial foretold (26.31-35).
 - g. The prayer in Gethsemane (26.36-46).
 - h. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus (26.47-56).
 - i. Jesus before the Sanhedrin (26.57-68).
 - j. Peter's denial of Jesus (26.69-75).
 - k. Jesus brought before Pilate (27.1-2).
 - l. The death of Judas (27.3-10).
 - m. Jesus questioned by Pilate (27.11-14).
 - n. Jesus sentenced to die (27.15-26).
 - o. Jesus is mocked by soldiers (27.27-31).
 - p. The crucifixion of Jesus (27.32-44).
 - q. The death of Jesus (27.45-56).
 - r. The burial of Jesus (27.57-61).
 - s. The guard at the tomb (27.62-66).
2. Matthew follows Mark closely, but expands the narrative, following the logic of Mark's narrative. He adds, however, the reference to the guard at the tomb, perhaps for apologetic reasons.
3. Matthew's themes in the Passion narrative include:
 - a. A "high" Christology, evinced in Jesus' prophetic foreknowledge and fulfillment.
 - b. A polemical emphasis on the responsibility of the Jewish leaders and supporters for Jesus' death.
 - c. Moral exemplars, which include Jesus, but also Peter and Judas, the women and other disciples, and the Gentile soldiers.

4. Matthew wrote late in the first century (*ca. A.D. 85-90*), and his polemic therefore reflects the fact that the Christians have now been excluded from the synagogue.