

TEXT: 27 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. 32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the King of the Jews. 38 Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself ! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself ! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " 44 In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

Dear Friends in Christ our King,

He got it right, didn't he? Pilate. He had the placard say, "**Jesus, King of the Jews.**" Jesus is King. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Rev. 17:14) Of course, Pilate didn't believe it. If he had he would not have had to be convinced to have Jesus crucified. If he had believed that Jesus was a King he would have seen that as a threat to Rome and Jesus would have been dealt with even more quickly than he was and if it were possible even more severely. No Pilate's words on the placard placed above Jesus' head on the cross which usually described the offense of which the criminal was guilty of, "**Jesus, King of the Jews,**" those words, were intended as an insult to the Jews who were forcing his hand here. He knew Jesus was innocent. He had washed his hands of the guilt of this man's innocent death. He was saying to them, "*You surely have a fine King who dies such a death.*" But even though he didn't know it, Pilate testified to the truth. Jesus is the King. Pilate was used by God to carry out an Old Testament prophecy. Remember what Isaiah wrote? "**He was led like a lamb to the slaughter ... numbered with the transgressors.**" (Isaiah 53:7, 12)

The Romans soldiers contributed to the mockery. A King needs a crown, a scepter, a robe and subjects who obey him. They put a crown of thorns on his head to inflict more pain on him. They gave him a staff for his scepter but then took it from him to beat him with it. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him only to mock him and to embarrass him. They certainly did not believe he was a King. Someday all of them will learn the truth when they stand before the throne of this King in judgment.

He doesn't look like a King, isn't treated like a King, but he is indeed a King, the King of Kings. Here in our text we clearly see what kind of King he is. Jesus is a King who came to us 1) Humbly, 2) Willingly, and 3) to save.

1

Jesus is our **humble King**. Paul said it beautifully in our epistle lesson today. "6 **Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped** (that is, something to take advantage of), 7 **but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.** 8 **And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!"** (Philippians 2:6-8) Jesus humbly took our place, became our substitute to endure the

wrath of God against our sins. He died *our* death on the cross. He committed no sin during his life that made him worthy to be punished.

Jesus' humility was in full display that Sunday. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, not a white stallion which would have been fitting for the King he was. A donkey! His red carpet was made up of the clothes of the common people and the branches of trees nearby, not a plush velvet carpet fit for a King. This King is God. The earth and everything in it belongs to Him, but he rides into Jerusalem with nothing. He rides into Jerusalem intent on doing one thing, making himself a nothing and dying for nothings like us.

What, dear friends, made us worthy in Jesus' eyes for him to humble himself in this way for us? The love of the Father. The will of the Father. There was nothing in us or about us that made us worthy of such humility on Jesus' part. He was humbling himself because we in our pride often put ourselves in God's place doing what we want to do, when we want to do it, if it is for our good, our benefit. We wouldn't think of serving others, especially not those who don't deserve it. But this is exactly what Jesus came to do. He came to serve us undeserving, unworthy sinners **"to give his life as a ransom."** (Mt. 20:28) He did this in love and obedience to his Heavenly Father's will. Remember what he said in his prayer there in the Garden of Gethsemane? **"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."** (Mt. 26:39)

2

Jesus came as **our willing King**. We can see the willingness of Jesus in several ways. He could have called on twelve legions of angels (Mt. 26:53) to avoid arrest, but he didn't. He stepped forward and identified himself to those who had come to arrest him in the garden. And, of course, his words, his prayer expressed his willingness to go through all the suffering that was necessary for mankind's salvation.

Jesus was willing to do this even though he knew what was ahead. God had been planning and revealing details about Jesus' death and its impact for a long time. Our Old Testament reading today revealed some of the torture Jesus was about to experience. **"I offered my back to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."** Isaiah 50:6). Most of us fear going to the dentist. What if we had been faced with the suffering and kind of death Jesus was faced with and knew about it beforehand. Wouldn't we have ran and tried to escape? Jesus calmly goes to receive what God had planned for him. Again the words of Isaiah's prophecy reveal our Saviors calm willingness. **"As a sheep before its shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth."** (Isaiah 53:7b)

Jesus willingly came to Jerusalem to suffer for the many times we have been unwilling to do our Father's will. He sacrificed himself for us who have often been unwilling to sacrifice our time, our money, our talents, for him. He willingly offered his back for us who often complained and whined when we had to lift a finger for him. Even though it meant pain and death for him, he came willingly for us who are unwilling to serve even though God promised to bless us when we serve him. We all have much to feel guilty of and be ashamed of, but Jesus willingly took not just our sins, but also the guilt and shame our sins cause away from us. God is happy to call us his children, we who believe in him, even with the sinful past we have.

3

Jesus, our King came **to save**. That's what the children and the crowds were singing that day we call Palm Sunday. **"Hosanna!"** they cried out singing. **"Hosanna to the Son of David!"** (Matthew 21:9) It was both a prayer and praise. Praising him as the Messiah they were praying to him to save them. That's what kings were anointed to do. They were to rule the people and protect them from their enemies.

Perhaps many who prayed to Jesus that day to save them were thinking of being saved from Roman oppression and rule. The truth is that Jesus came to save them and us from even greater oppressors, sin, death and Satan. He did indeed come to bring release, freedom, for the oppressed. For when he died on that cross, he saved us from the wrath and punishment of God toward us. **"The punishment that brought us peace was upon him...by his wounds we are healed."** (Isaiah 53:5)

Wow! There was a lot going on in that little donkey ride from Bethany to Jerusalem that day. But Pilate didn't know it. Most of the crowd didn't know it. By God's grace we know that Jesus, our humble, willing King came to save us all from sin, death, Satan and hell! He is our King, our Lord. Let's celebrate! Amen.