ST. PAUL’S AND ST. JOHN’S ANGLICAN
SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, OLord, my rock and my redeemer.

This is one of the most difficult sermons I have ever had to write, not because I can’t express myself, but because the subject matter is so emotional, so very sad.

We are now in the Passiontide, the latter part of the Lenten season when the overwhelming sense of tragedy coming towards us weighs heavier and heavier upon us. Even though we know after two thousand or so years of telling and retelling the story how the whole thing turns out, and we can look soon forward to the Resurrection,
still we feel all the sorrow and sadness and suffering that Jesus endured.

The scene of this morning’s gospel passage is set in Jerusalem shortly after the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday, very likely in or near the Temple.

Some Greeks - ‘Greek’ in this context meant any foreigner from the Mediterranean area whose first language wasn’t the Aramaic that Jesus spoke - some Greeks had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the founding celebration of Judaism, at The Temple itself; these Greeks had heard about Jesus and wanted to see Him for
themselves. Now remember that Jerusalem was heaving with pilgrims from far and wide, and the Jewish authorities and the Romans were twitching with concern about keeping their positions of power, because they too had heard about Jesus and his effect
on the people, and his claim to be the son of David and even the Messiah forecast by Isaiah. From their perspective, Jerusalem was a tinderbox.
And Jesus, our gentle Jesus, meek and mild, our prince of peace, our Emmanuel, who knew exactly what was in store for him, was not, obviously looking forward to his trials. Jesus' reply to Philip and Andrew’s request on behalf of the Greeks was : “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. Nothing is said about whether he agreed to see the Greeks, but I think they must have been allowed to muscle their way through the crowds and see the man who they didn’t yet recognize to be the Saviour of everyone, Jews and gentiles - that’s us - alike.

Jesus goes on to say “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.” What reason brings Jesus to such a pitch? Us. Us and OUR sins and OUR shortcomings. Let’s think
about that for a minute.
All of us sin. All of us from time to time turn our backs to God and do things out of
selfishness or cowardice or laziness or greed that distress God. Sometimes exercising our free will can cause us to find ourselves in that ‘gnashing of teeth in outer darkness’ state of being that comes from divorcing ourselves from God.

But God so loved the world that he sent his only son to save us from that hell. And Jesus allowed himself to be executed on the cross, not the Jewish execution by stoning - which is painful, but not prolonged - but the agonizing, sometimes as much as forty-eight or more hours of slowly strangling to death on the cross, a humiliating death
because the victim was stripped naked, and the death was reserved for rebellious slaves. The Romans had some pretty imaginative ways of killing people, but crucifixion is pretty well the nastiest.

And Jesus knows that this is coming up, and living as he was in a human body, it is only natural that he looked forward to it with no pleasure. Jesus loved us humans enough that he never lost his resolution to go through with it. He could have asked to be
released from the ordeal, and God would have done it for him. But then we wouldn’t have been saved from our sins, and granted eternal life. So, Jesus accepted his destiny. Because Jesus loves us. God loves us. And yet we continue to sin. Let’s think about that some more.

Today we are called to repent our sins, the sins that caused our lovely, kind and compassionate and merciful Jesus to go to the Cross for our sake, today we are called to recall each of our sins, and to repent of them. We are called to resolve to sin no more, to do our best to cause Jesus no more grief for our sake.

We spend the next fourteen days in sorrow and repentance, in anticipation of Resurrection Easter Sunday. We are now, as ever, called to live a Christian life: to love God with all our heart and soul, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

It sounds simple. I guess it is simple. Simple doesn’t mean easy. But I can spell out consolation and comfort and support and guidance in two words: Holy Spirit. Whole heartedly on our side, utterly reliable, at all times, in all places, especially in our hearts. Amen.