

Palm/Passion Sunday A - Comments/questions on the lessons for March 29, 2026

Processional Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

- Why does Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a colt “that has never been ridden”? Matthew’s version ties the scene specifically into Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Though it gets taken later as a sign of the Messiah, riding on a colt also shows humility. Jesus comes not in greatness, but in humility. How can we follow Jesus’ example?
- We often hear this word “Hosanna!” without knowing what it means. The word is a phrase that means, “Help/Save (us), I pray!” The people partially quote a psalm here: “Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! ... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Psalm 118:25-26) It is also used as a plea to a king, as a woman cries in 2 Samuel 14:4, “Help, O king!” So, when the people cry out, “Hosanna,” are they merely praising God? Or are they expecting deliverance from Roman power? The latter may indicate why they turn on Jesus so quickly, since the deliverance of Jesus brings is not what they expect?
- Only in Matthew does Jesus ride on the back of **two** animals: a donkey and a colt. He likely does so because the verse that Matthew quotes (in the Greek) refers to two animals.
- Only in Matthew do we have the city asking, “Who is this?” They do not know who Jesus is. The crowds respond, identifying Jesus as a prophet from Galilee.

Isaiah 50:4-9a

- When Jesus was alive, the “suffering servant” passages were never seen as what would happen with the coming Messiah. With the death of the one they thought was Messiah, early followers of Jesus started to look in the Hebrew Bible for other passages and found (as one example) these passages from Isaiah.
- At the same time, it is important to see that Isaiah initially intended this passage to represent either what Israel went through in the Exile or what a prophet endures when proclaiming a word from God. When we associate these two things together, it says that Jesus goes through what we are called to go through.
- In the opening verse of this passage, Isaiah offers two powerful images of speaking and listening. First, he describes the task of the teacher – “to sustain the weary with a word.” How can our teaching sustain the weary? How can it encourage? How can it comfort? Second, he offers an image of listening: “Morning by morning he wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.” By placing this image next to the image of teaching, he reminds us that listening is just as important as speaking for the teacher. Further, he encourages all of us to adopt from the start of our day the attitude of listening.

Psalms 31:9-16

- The psalm for the day offers something similar to the reading from Isaiah. The psalm is a cry for deliverance from one’s enemies and a declaration of trust in God in the midst of distress. Yet, when we read these verses in light of Jesus’ suffering and death, we see his suffering and death reflected in these verses.

Philippians 2:5-11

- As a reminder: many scholars think that this is an early Christian hymn that Paul quotes. If so, that means that this is one of the earliest expressions we have of how the early church understood the death of Jesus. We think that Paul wrote this sometime between 54 and 59 AD. Thus, this hymn could date to the 40’s AD. As a gospel contrast, Mark was not likely written until 68-70 AD.
- In light of this hymn, what does the death of Jesus mean for how we are called to be?

Matthew 26:14 – 27:66 (refer to Bibles for highlights) – Here are significant differences in Matthew’s Gospel:

- Only in Matthew are we told that the amount of Judas’s betrayal – 30 pieces of silver. Though significant, this sum contrasts sharply with the anointing of Jesus’ feet that has just happened.
- In Matthew, Jesus instructs the disciples sent to prepare for the Passover to say “My time is near.” Also, he does not request a place. He demands or expects it.
- In Matthew, Judas specifically asks, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” with Jesus responding, “You have said so.” (26:25)
- ***Only in Matthew, do we hear Jesus command the disciples, “Eat ... Drink ...” Only in Matthew does he tie the wine/blood poured with the forgiveness of sins.***
- ***When Jesus prays the second time in Gethsemane, we hear his words, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” (26:42) This is a shift from the first prayer where he initially asks that the cup pass from him. This shift shows how prayer is meant to change us rather than changing God.***
- In the garden, Jesus tells Judas, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” (26:50)
- ***Only in Matthew do we hear Jesus say when the ear is cut off: “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?” (26:52-54)***
- Matthew names Caiaphas as the high priest (26:57). His ultimate question to Jesus is expanded, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” (26:63)
- In Matthew the two witnesses that speak of Jesus destroying the temple is enough to convict him.
- In Matthew, the third time that Peter is accused of being with Jesus, they say, “for your accent betrays you.” (26:73)
- ***Matthew is the only gospel that records the death/suicide of Judas. It differs from the death of Judas in Acts 1:18-19. In Matthew, Judas hangs himself. In Acts, Judas falls headlong into a field and “burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.”***
- ***In Matthew, Barabbas is called a “notorious prisoner,” and is also named Jesus Barabbas, so that the choice for release is between two named Jesus: Jesus Barabbas or Jesus called Messiah. (27:16-17).***
- ***Only in Matthew does the wife of Pilate tell him to have nothing to do with Jesus because he is innocent and she has had dreams about him. (27:19)***
- ***Only in Matthew does Pilate wash his hands before the people, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” (27:24), with the people responding, “His blood be on us and our children!” (27:25) This is a deeply ironic statement, given Matthew’s emphasis on the blood of Jesus as poured for the forgiveness of sins.***
- In Matthew, the robe of Jesus is scarlet (vs. purple in Mark) and he is given a reed.
- In the taunts from the chief priests, Matthew adds the words, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” (27:43)
- ***Only in Matthew do we have an earthquake when Jesus dies that opens up tombs with many rising from the dead (27:51-53). The centurion’s declaration, “Truly this man was God’s Son,” results from the earthquake not the death and comes from fear not faith – unlike Mark.***
- Only in Matthew is Joseph of Arimathea identified as a disciple of Jesus (27:57). Only in Matthew is the tomb identified as Joseph’s own (27:60).
- ***Only in Matthew do the chief priests request that soldiers be placed at the tomb, lest the disciples steal the body. They understand that Jesus said that he would rise on the third day. (27:62-66)***