



Roanoke, Virginia

April 13, 2025

“Wisdom Crucified”

Wisdom Sermon Series Part VI

Matthew 27:45-50; Acts 3:14-18

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Matthew 27:45-50

45 *From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.*

Lord!

They waved branches. They shouted, “Hosanna!” The disciples laid their coats on the colt. The crowds laid their coats on the road. It looked like a parade, but it was a protest in disguise. Because Jesus wasn't riding into the city to be crowned—he was riding in to be confronted.

Palm Sunday sets us up. It lifts us into celebration—but only for a moment. Because this is not a victory march. It's a procession toward a cross. And only one person truly knew it that day.

That's where we begin to feel the dissonance. The tension between what they wanted and who Jesus was—between who they *wanted* him to be and who he *needed* to be. The crowds wanted a



king who would restore power to the people. Instead, they got a Savior who surrendered it. They wanted a revolution with swords and shields. Instead, they got a man who knelt down, washed feet, and told them to love their enemies.

And by the end of the week, their “Hosanna” had turned into silence.

On this Palm Sunday, we, too, look ahead to the cross. Now I know there’s so much to be asked about the crucifixion. There’s so much to be said, pondered, and debated about the theological meanings of the cross. What precisely happened when Jesus died? Is there any certainty about sin, sacrifice, death, atonement, and eternity in light of Christ’s death?

What did his crucifixion actually accomplish, and did it have to be the cross? What if Jesus never made it to the cross—what if he fell off his donkey as he rode into Jerusalem and hit his head? Would salvation have still come from that?

These are all essential questions. As unsettling as these questions may be, they are not threats to faith—they are signs of a faith that is alive enough to wrestle with mystery. That is why minds far deeper and scholars much smarter than I have considered them for centuries. But this sermon is not about all the theories of salvation. I’m not going into the ins-and-outs of ransom theory, substitutionary atonement, Christus-Victor, or moral exemplar.¹ I know, I’m sorry. I want to stay focused on the raw reality of the story. The bare and unadorned passion. The striking story of betrayal, denial, and abandonment. The story of cruel, unjust trials, false accusations, and Jesus’s noticeable silence through it all. The story of floggings. The story of thorns. The story of bloody wounds and belittled humanity. The story of honest grief and pain. The story of what happens when the God we want and think we know doesn’t show up.

In Matthew’s passion narrative, Jesus only speaks 3 times. Simply replying to Caiaphas’ and then Pontius Pilate’s questioning with, “You say so.”² And the third and final time, at the cross, Jesus cries out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

His cry is real. His cry is raw. His cry is honest. But this cry isn’t a loss of faith. It’s an expression of truth. Every single word in this sentence, even its punctuation, is an expression of truth. The truth of abandonment. Of betrayal. The truth that even the Son of God asks *why*. The truth of emotional isolation. Of human desperation. The truth that God knows our pain. The truth of a world that couldn’t recognize its own God when God was being criminalized, beaten,

¹ *Ransom Theory*—Christ was the “ransom” paid in exchange for humanity’s freedom and liberation; *Substitutionary Atonement*—Christ was our substitute, dying in our place in order to bear the punishment that our sins deserved and performing all that was necessary in order for us to be counted as righteous; *Christus-Victor*—the work of Christ in his death and resurrection is the ultimate victory over the powers of sin and death; *Moral Exemplar*—suggests that Jesus’ death serves as a powerful example of God’s love and sacrifice, inspiring humanity towards moral improvement and reconciliation with God, focusing on Jesus’ life and teachings rather than direct payment for sin.

² Matthew 26: 63-64, 27:11



wrongfully sentenced to death. Jesus' cry was the truth of a world that couldn't recognize its own God when God was hanging in front of them.

But that world isn't a foreign world, that crowd isn't a foreign crowd. This is our world. This is us. These are not strangers in the crowd—they are insiders. Religious leaders. Civic authorities. Ordinary people and travelers who have come to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival.

From a crowd shouting "Hosanna" on Sunday to a crowd shouting "Crucify him" on Friday, these are faithful people doing what they thought was right, defending the truth as they understood it.

Let's fast forward to another crowd. A crowd gathered not in the streets to see a parade, but in the Temple to see a miracle.

In Acts 3, Peter and John encounter a man lame from birth at the gate of the temple. Peter heals the man in the name of Jesus and all three walk into the Temple together. People notice this and rush into the temple as well. Peter stands in the Temple, alongside John and the man who is now healed, as the crowd gathers around them in astonishment.

Luke 18:14-18

14 When Peter saw [that they were astonished], he addressed the people, "Fellow Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

Ignorance. Peter claims it was ignorance. Not malice. Not cruelty. But something more insidious: unexamined certainty. The illusion of truth.

Peter is not talking to pagans. He's not calling out the Romans. Peter is a Jew, talking to Jews, about a Jew that was killed. He's talking to his own people. He is not talking to enemies of God, but people who believed in God. People who worshipped in the temple. People who prayed, tithed, and read and knew their Scripture.

And that makes this an insider sermon. Just like this one.



Peter stood in solidarity with the people—not above them, but among them—and named the uncomfortable truth: that it is possible to love God and still miss God. That we can be devout, faithful, and a pious people—and still reject divine wisdom when it doesn't fit the mold we've made for it. But this is not condemnation. This is invitation.

Because Peter doesn't stop at naming ignorance—yes, he does name it, and name it he must. But he goes on to proclaim resurrection. “God raised Jesus from the dead,” he says. And not just to prove a point, but to make a path. To show that the story isn't over. The same Peter who once denied Jesus by firelight now stands with fire in his bones. He's not condemning the crowd—he's confessing his own transformation—and invites the crowd to do the same. He is telling the crowd that even when we get it wrong—even when we are complicit in the systems that act unjustly and crucify innocence—God still acts. God still heals. God still raises the dead.

But we can't jump straight to resurrection without first recognizing what we put to death.

Just like Peter, we have to name the ways we crucify Wisdom.

We crucify Wisdom when we silence voices that make us uncomfortable.

We crucify Wisdom when we prioritize church survival over Gospel truth.

We crucify Wisdom when we confuse being nice with being just.

We crucify Wisdom when we mistake comfort for calling.

The cross of Christ doesn't just reveal God's love—it exposes our illusions.

It shows us what we're willing to sacrifice to maintain control.

It shows us what kind of savior we really want. And it shows us what kind of Savior God gives us instead.

And that's the power of Peter's preaching. This is not for someone else. This is for us. For those of us who follow Jesus, who sit in pews, who pray unceasingly and sincerely and yet still carry assumptions and perspectives that betray the very Gospel we claim and the very Jesus we love.

It's now our insider sermon. And like Peter, we are not called to shame each other, to point fingers, blame and deflect—but to tell the truth, the God's-honest truth to each other. To acknowledge our ignorance so that grace can do its work. To confront our illusions so that real transformation can begin.

And here comes one of those essential questions again: Was Jesus killed to reconcile humanity to God, to pay the price-tag of sin? Well, like I said, I'm not going to answer that question. However, taking this story at face-value, one could conclude that one reason Jesus was killed was because he was a threat to the Roman Empire. He challenged the powers that be and began a grass-roots revolution. So, Rome stopped him. However, Jesus was not just killed by empire. He was killed by religious people who couldn't tolerate the idea that God was bigger,



broader, and bolder than they imagined. People who clung to tradition not as a living memory, but as a shield against change.

And if we're not willing to ask whether we've done the same, then we're still standing in the crowd. But, friends, here's the good news: the revolution is still alive today and God keeps showing up. Even after betrayal. Even after denial. Even after ignorance. The cross was a collision between divine grace and human fear, a moment where God absorbed our violence to end its cycle.

Peter says God used even their rejection to fulfill divine purpose. That's not an excuse for injustice—it's a promise that grace can meet us even in our worst moments—and trust me there are far too many to count. And so, the crucifixion wasn't only an execution, it was a revelation. A cosmic act where God absorbed the full force of our violence and returned it with forgiveness.

Again, let me repeat myself, this is not condemnation—it is invitation. A holy invitation to be honest, an invitation to see, and an invitation to act.

Will we see the ways we've made Jesus in our own image?

We will see the moments our "Hosannas" are truly shouts for salvation?

Will we see the places where divine Wisdom still challenges us today?

Will we see the crucified and resurrected Christ standing in our midst—not just comforting us, but calling us?

Calling us to act—act not in carelessness but in radical courage, not cautiously, but recklessly. Recklessly in love. Recklessly in mercy. Recklessly in the name of Wisdom Crucified.

Because when we truly follow the one who was crucified, we don't play it safe:

We love when it's inconvenient.

We stand up when it's unpopular.

We welcome when the world says exclude.

We admit our mistakes and we try our hardest to do better.

We speak truth even when it shakes our own foundations.

That's what it means to be an Easter people in a Good Friday world.

Today we begin our Holy Week journey to the cross and to the empty tomb.

So may this Palm Sunday not be a performance. May it be a reimagining.

And may we walk toward the cross with open eyes, open hands, and open hearts—troubled by our ignorance, yes, but energized by grace, and ready to follow Wisdom, even when it leads us to die a little—sacrifice in the name of love, so something more holy, more honest, more alive can rise.

And to that we might proclaim Wisdom Crucified and then Wisdom Resurrected.

To God be the glory. Amen.

