



# ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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## Stay With Me

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, April 10, 2022*

*The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday*

*Based on Luke 19:28-40; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 23:1-49*

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.*

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

It's one of the most shocking, earth-shattering stories told. Maybe the most shocking, earth-shattering story ever.

God comes to dwell among us. God shows us a love the world has never known. We respond by rejecting God ... over and over and over again. And in the final humiliation, we hoist the Lord of Creation on a cross, pound nails into his hands and feet, pierce his side with a spear, give him gall to drink, and leave him to die, an innocent between thieves.

It is the most shocking, sad and unforgettable story you could possibly tell. After you hear it, what else is there to say? Every time I preach a sermon on Palm Sunday, I wonder, "Can't we just sit and let the story sink in? Can't we just dwell with our Lord, the betrayal, the grief, the horror? Why are we still talking?!"

So let it sink in now. Let the images move before your eyes.

Jesus triumphant, riding into Jerusalem on a colt. Can you see him? Can you hear the crowds shouting with joy: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord"?

Let yourself feel Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Feel how his heart is caught in his throat as he tries to pray and can't, because the tears are choking him. Feel his disappointment, his anger, his anguish, as he cries to God and is met with silence, as he stumbles out to his friends and finds them sleeping when he needs them most.

Can you see our Lord before the courts of the high priests and then before the mighty Pilate? Notice the cool of his brow, as these high and mighty ones push and needle him? Can you hear the exasperation creeping into their voices as they try every way they know how to trap him?

And the crowds. Please, let yourself really hear the crowds. "Crucify him," they said. Louder and louder: "Crucify him! He's not one of us! He's not our king!" Do you see the spit flying from their mouths, as they shout and beg Pilate to take Jesus away and leave them in peace?

But they're not the only ones on hand. Do you see the women who loved and provided for Jesus? Do you see them refusing to hide, but instead following his every step? They are bent over, beating their breasts. Then they arch back, wailing to the skies. Do you hear their voices, their longing? Walk with them.

And now, do you see it? The hill, that desolate mound called Golgotha, which means Skull? See the Son of God stripped, vulnerable, abandoned, mounted on two pieces of wood, his body stretched taut up the center, his arms painfully extended, legs pinned, nailed, weak, dying?

It is noon. One o'clock. Two o'clock. Notice the sun hiding its face, as darkness creeps over the land. Do you hear his voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"? Take in his grief. His resignation. His total surrender.

Can you feel Jesus' last breath? Can you see him dying? Can you sit for a time, at the feet of our crucified Lord? Even if it makes you tremble, tremble and tremble ... can you stay?

Pay attention, people of God. Let the story unfold as if you were there. Go there. With Jesus. If not now, when?

In the week ahead, you may be back at church. I hope you will be. Come for Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Vigil. You will also go about your week, buy your Easter ham or lamb, prep the Easter baskets, get ready for the feast that is to come.

Wherever God leads you this Holy Week, don't miss the chance to re-enter this mystery, to get steeped in this story, to linger and let the horror and wonder work its way with you.

It's tempting to avoid it or just to speed right by. I don't know about you, but I tend to start Lent strong and then get soft by about week 3. What did I promise anyway? Oh yeah, I said I'd do the Daily Office every day, avoid fried food and shopping. Sorry, God. I'll get on that this week.

But you know, the disciplines themselves aren't the point. They're the way to a closer walk with Jesus, who suffered and surrendered so much. They're a way to snap us out of moving through life on auto-pilot, so we can pay attention. See him. Feel him. Love him.

So please, pay attention this week. Dwell more intentionally with our Lord than you do at any other time of the year. Inhabit his story fully. The hope. The despair. The wonder. The emptiness.

Every time we hear it, we're in different circumstances. And that means every time, God comes to us afresh. You're certainly not who you were a year ago, my friends. Over the last year, we have stepped out even further on faith, learned to move together deeper into wilderness.

We have known heights, and we have witnessed crucifixion. We have known death. In Ukraine, in our own family and friend circles. And we are not done. We're still waiting for a resurrection life we don't yet know.

The only way to find out is to pay attention. Especially now, especially while we're still in this Lenten wilderness. Draw near to Jesus. Taste him, feel him, see him, hear him, hurt with him.

Allow whatever in you needs to grieve and die to rest with him. When he rises on that great getting up morning, and he surely will, you will rise with him, too. But for now, this holiest of weeks, we watch. We grieve. We yearn. We breathe. We dwell.

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