

Scripture Reading:

Acts 23:12 “12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. 14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near." 16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you." 19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside & asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. 21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." 22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." 23 And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; 24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor." 25 He wrote a letter in the following manner: 26 Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell. 31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.”

"Paul is Moved to Caesarea"

Here at Church of the King, we try to focus on the major markers of the Church calendar, remembering Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and Christ's ascension followed by Trinity Sunday and ordinary time each year.

- This year as we move through Acts exegetically, our text brings us to subjects that relate very easily with Palm Sunday this week and Easter Sunday next week!

Next week we will see Paul defending himself in Caesarea with the resurrection being front and center as it should be in our Christian witness! Palm Sunday is when we remember the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at His appointed time. However, we must remember that while many in the crowds hailed Him as a coming King to free them from the yoke of Rome, many also joined the chorus of crucify him crucify him just a few days latter.

Jesus had in fact come for judgment:

- He came to fulfill the mission He had been given by the Father to carry out by presenting Himself as the one sacrifice for the sins of His people: Taking God's just wrath due our sin upon Himself!

Jesus also came to pronounce His final judgment on the religious leaders who had rejected Him as the Messiah, predicting the final destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple, as we read in Matthew chapter twenty-four.

We have spent a great deal of time considering the context of this final trip that Paul has made to Jerusalem and we know that the destruction that Jesus predicted is now only a few years away. Much of what we will see in our text this morning clearly shows the final stages of this failed Jewish leadership and Paul's removal from Jerusalem can be seen as a foreshadowing of what all the Saints still in Jerusalem would do in just a few short years, avoiding certain death.

- Last week we took a long look at how Jesus brought comfort to Paul in an hour of need and how it applies to our lives today.

Jesus assured Paul that he had been the witness he needed to be in Jerusalem and that now he would go on to witness in Rome.

- Luke goes on to tell us how God worked out all the details of moving Paul from Jerusalem to Rome.

Paul had cleverly divided the Jewish council to get the Pharisees and Sadducees fighting with each other instead of being focused on convicting Paul. Once Paul was back in Roman custody, I noted that they could well have thought to themselves, 'how did we let him get away with that!' We see that many outside of the council were also very upset that Paul had, in their minds, 'gotten away'...

"12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy."

- What we have here is a group that is motivated much more by rage than wisdom: They make a rash vow to commit murder.
- These men go to the Jewish leaders to explain what they have done and ask them to join in their wicked conspiracy:

15 "Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

- The willingness of the council to go along with such an illegal and unbiblical action surely confirms Paul's charge before that council that Ananias was NOT in fact God's high priest!
- Next we get a small glimpse into Paul's personal life...

16 "So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul."

- This is all that we know of Paul's family, but it reminds us that he was not just a lone Pharisee, but a Jewish man with family members in the faith and at least some of them in Jerusalem.
- Conspiracies are tough to keep secret, especially when you have over forty participants who go to the council for their help! *[Mention the number 40]*
- Paul then has the centurion, who is charged with guarding him, take the boy to the commander...

19 "Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside & asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. 21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."

- The boy accurately tells the commander what is afoot and warns him to be careful. The commander takes this to heart because he has already had to rescue Paul not once but twice from violent mobs.
- This should remind us that the end for Jerusalem is very near: The nation of Israel is approaching its final death throes.
- The commander then tells the boy to keep quiet about his visit and prepares to take decisive action:

23 “And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; 24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”

- Some have argued that this would have been real overkill in dealing with a single prisoner, even suggesting that Luke might be embellishing on the story just a bit.
- However, we need to remember that at least forty men are part of this conspiracy and that the commander now knows that he is protecting a Roman citizen.
- This commander was NOT going to find himself trying to explain how a smaller group was overwhelmed by these Jewish zealots resulting in Paul’s death while under his care.
- He is going to have Paul moved that very evening at nine o’clock under the cover of darkness.
- Along with Paul he must send a letter to the governor explaining why Paul has been transferred.
- Luke gives us the name of the commander & contents of the letter:

26 “Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. *[There is a bit of revisionist history here, since Claudius almost scourged Paul before he discovered he was a Roman citizen, something he really did not want to have to tell the governor!]*

28 “And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.”

Later that night the soldiers will take Paul as instructed. The hundreds of foot soldiers and spearmen will travel as far as Antipatris which was a journey of about thirty-five miles. At this point, having no trouble with the Jewish zealots, they then return to Jerusalem knowing that the horseman can now safely deliver Paul the final twenty-seven miles to Caesarea.

- In the coming weeks we will learn that the Apostle Paul spends over two years in prison at Caesarea!

There he will face several trials and interrogations as the Roman Governors try to determine what should be done with him. Of course we, as Paul did at that time, know what the outcome is going to be:

- Paul will witness for Jesus in the City of Rome!

Obviously the beginning of that journey was pretty dramatic being moved out of Jerusalem at night accompanied by hundreds of Roman soldiers. Paul was protected by pretty ordinary means: Human authority and soldiers. Did he need all of this when Jesus had said he would be his witness in Rome?

I think this gives us another reminder about how we are to understand the relationship between God’s sovereign will and our human actions.

When Paul's nephew came to him with news of the conspiracy to have him murdered, Paul could easily have said, 'don't worry son, Jesus visited me just last night and assured me that I was going to Rome, so there is no way these men will be able to kill me here!'

- Rather, the Apostle Paul immediately took action to make sure that he was protected.

Does this mean that he did not believe Jesus or have the faith to believe that Jesus would deliver him?

- Absolutely not!

In fact, it confirms that he did believe what Jesus said while understanding that God most often uses regular means to accomplish His divine plans! We can see how this works in so many ways in our lives:

When it comes to our salvation, we know that God has elected His people from before the foundation of the world and yet each of us makes the volitional choice to repent and believe and to live a faithful Christian life. Do we do this because we do not really believe that God has written our names in the Lamb's Book of Life or that He will keep us faithful?

NO, rather we do so because we know that God uses ordinary means to accomplish His extraordinary ends?

When we baptize our covenant children and give them back to the parents, we are claiming God's promise that His salvation is unto us and our children. Are we doubting that promise when we use the board of education to correct them when they are young or call upon them to affirm their faith in Jesus as their Savior when they come to an age of understanding or call them to an obedient life as one of His Saints for the rest of their lives?

- NO, rather we are affirming our trust in His promise, believing that He will use such ordinary means to accomplish His extraordinary ends!

When our young people or others take their marriage vows, we are claiming the promise that the two of them will become one flesh and demonstrate the very nature of God's Triune love in their marital relationship. Are we doubting that promise when we encourage them to learn from the older women or wise men in our congregation about how they are to be a loving husband or an obedient wife?

- NO, again we are trusting that God uses ordinary means to accomplish His extraordinary ends!

Such was the case this evening as God used the power of Rome and a lot of individual soldiers who were not even believers to protect God's messenger.

- I am sure that Paul was a bit taken back by this means of deliverance because he would have been just as confident of a safe journey to Caesarea had it been a single unarmed soldier that escorted him.

I may be arguing from silence in the text, but I do think it is significant that Paul did not object to the size of the escort or even advise the commander that it did not have to be this large because he had God's assurance that he would make it safely to Rome.

- This should remind us to enjoy the overabundant blessings that God often showers on His people rather than giving the typical American response of 'you did not need to go to that much trouble!'

I hope these lessons will be helpful and very practical for our lives today.

- As we close on this Palm Sunday I also want to quickly reflect on the historical significance of this event and why I think Luke has given us so many details at this point of his orderly account.

Remember that we saw Paul's heart for his Jewish brethren in our review of Romans nine, ten and eleven which he wrote right before this trip.

He wanted to see them saved and went to Jerusalem in part to witness to them.

Jesus has personally assured Paul that he did witness to them, both in how he reached out to the weaker Saints who were still zealous for the Law and the speech before the people at the Temple.

- **Paul was also to be the final witness to the religious leaders who had him slapped down before he could even finish his salutation.**

Jesus also came to Jerusalem years before at His appointed time. A time where He should have been heralded as the Messiah who had come to save His people from their sins. Jesus came with His disciples and followers who believed but were certainly very weak at this point like many of the Saints Paul reached out to in Jerusalem during this last visit.

- **There were some as I mentioned who cried Hosanna only to be caught up in the mob action to kill Jesus days latter.**

I am sure that many of these were among the thousands saved at Pentecost and the days after. And of course we had those hardened religious leaders who wanted nothing to do with Jesus or any Messiah that did not fit their plans. We studied this in Luke's account of Palm Sunday where we see the stern warning from Jesus:

Luke 19: "35b "They threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Jesus on him. 36 And as He went, many spread their clothes on the road. 37 Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38 saying: "'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

Jesus was properly being heralded as the Savior who came at His appointed time, even though His own disciples did not yet understand how He would suffer and die for their sins!

- **BUT Jesus is very serious about those rocks: IF the disciples had been intimidated by these religious leaders into being silent, the very creation itself would have proclaimed the day of visitation for God's people.**

Jesus not only knew that this was their day of visitation but He also knew what their rejection of Him would mean.

41 "Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, 42saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Later in this same week Jesus would pronounce His judgment on the Pharisees and Sadducees with a biting serious of woes and then conclude by telling them in Matthew chapter 23:

36 "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate; 39 for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' "

Jesus gave them the call of the Gospel!

This was their day of visitation and they needed to heed the voice of Jesus!

This was the final generation for the nation of Israel. The Spirit of God had been taken from the Temple years before as seen by Ezekiel and now the physical Temple was approaching its final days.

The Spirit would return as promised, but He would descend at Pentecost NOT upon the old temple, but rather on the Church, the Bride of Jesus.

And the Comforter is with us today as he carries out His mission to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus...

- **As He does so, He desires to use us as the ordinary means to accomplish His extraordinary work.**

And finally as we ponder the warning that Jesus gave His people in Jerusalem about knowing their day of visitation, we should often keep in mind those words of encouragement and warning that the Apostle Paul had just written some months before to the Saints at Rome after encouraging them to fulfill the law by loving their neighbors:

“11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry & drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

Communion Meditation: Genesis 18

- **God visited Abraham in the heat of the day:**

"My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant."

Abraham pleads with them to stay and be comforted and to be fed:

- **Look at his preparations that are made!**

6 "So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes." 7 And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it. 8 So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate."

- **This fellowship around a meal was followed by a great blessing announcing that Sarah will have a child and great judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah!**