

- Welcome members, friends, and any viewers who may find us on the internet. Welcome to our Passion Sunday sermon during this time of the Coronavirus
- Today is a Sunday that begins with Jesus entering Jerusalem to cheering crowds shouting Hosanna and waving palm branches, but then the story and our worship soon move to crowds of people calling for Jesus' death
- In today's gospel we hear about two men named Jesus
- Resistance had been growing among the Temple authorities to the teachings of Jesus, and so when their anger came to a climax, they bribed Judas, one of Jesus' followers, for 30 pieces of silver to betray Jesus
- A crowd of people then captured Jesus, brought him before the Temple high priest, and in that conversation an even deeper wedge was driven between them, so they handed Jesus over to the Romans to be dealt with
- Now after Jesus had been handed over to the Pilate, the Roman governor, Pilate, was faced with an angry crowd
- So being something of a political hack, Pilate presented the crowd with two prisoners – Jesus of Nazareth, and a criminal named Jesus Barabbas
- Now if you like irony, here's a big one – Barabbas literally means “Son of the Father”, so the crowd was given the choice of choosing whether to release Jesus of Nazareth who *really was and still is the true, innocent* Son of the Father, or the criminal who in name only, was the Jesus Son of the Father
- And of course the crowd made the wrong choice, and Jesus the true Son of the Father was condemned, mocked as king, and sent to his death on the cross
- The crowd made a TERRIBLE choice
- NOW WE might be tempted to think that *if WE had been there, we might have behaved differently*
- But let's be honest. Since then Jesus has been revealed as the true Son of God, but there in Jerusalem in those days, no one – not Judas who betrayed him, not Peter who denied him, and not any of the other disciples who were close to Jesus fully saw who Jesus was or stood by him in his trial
- The truth is, both disciples of Jesus, and people of the world make terrible choices, and in some of our choices, we only see our folly in hindsight
- Of course the Coronavirus is on our minds and restricting our lives every day

- And with all the time on our hands, we can look back and wish that perhaps we had made some different choices
- We can wish that we had more savings in the bank
- We can wish that we had a more stable job
- We can wish that we had spent with family and friends before we were cut off from them
- We can wish that we and others had acted more quickly to isolate ourselves
- Or judgment, and our choices are sometimes even more deeply flawed, and in fact – in fact that is part of being human
- Part of being human is that in our lives we often not just make – *but are pulled and drawn into making bad decisions*
- Some years ago we were vacationing in Canada long before there were cell phones and traffic apps
- We got up in the morning and during the news we heard a traffic report about road construction and an expected delay of over an hour in traffic, but I did catch in the report that the traffic jam would build up in the vicinity of the stadium where the Detroit Tigers play baseball
- We were strangers in the area, were in Canada about to drive to Michigan, and we were using a roadmap
- So we drove over an hour, crossed into the United States, somewhere went through a tollbooth, missed an exit, and found ourselves in gridlock with Tiger stadium looking off to our right... and we sat for almost two hours
- The stadium and the traffic jam was like a magnet, just pulling us into the mess, and we just couldn't help taking the wrong road
- That folks, is what SIN is like
- It permeates our lives, it taints our choices, and it pulls us to make the wrong choices even when we don't intend to
- We make bad choices in life, and if we had been in Jerusalem long ago in Pilate's court, we too would have been pulled like a magnet to choose the criminal Son of the Father instead of Jesus the true Son of God
- *But here's the Good News* – as important as are the choices in life that we make, ultimately... ultimately *our future does not rest on us making all the right choices and choosing Jesus of Nazareth, the true Son of the Father*

- Instead, in this Holy Week, we hear once again the story, and more importantly in hearing the story we hear once again the promise that Jesus of Nazareth, the true Son of God, chose the way of the cross
- The way of the cross was, and still is GOD'S CHOICE, because in the cross of Jesus the Son of God, Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus the Christ, Jesus is the anointed one WHO CHOOSES US!
- His cross, his death, his sacrifice is God's way of literally loving us even to his death
- And of course, the death of Jesus does not get the last word...
- Next Sunday we will celebrate Christ's victory over humanity's sinful choices, God's victory even over death itself...
- But in the meantime, let join the Roman soldier who stood by the cross and marveled, absolutely marveled, saying "Truly THIS man was God's Son!"