

March 29, 2026 Palm Sunday

Rev. Ali Rode

Matthew 21: 1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54

“Christ in All”

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

Good morning, beloved children of God.

As we journeyed through lent we have reflected during our midweek vespers on Holy Conversations with Jesus. I want to encourage you to, if you have not, watch the replay of those services thru this Holy Week. On Facebook they exist for 30 days, but they are archived on our YouTube page so you might be able to reflect on some of them throughout your Holy Week. Recorded worship services and sermons are part of my spiritual disciplines. Often I listen while doing household chores, adult coloring, or exercising. The spoken word helps me reflect on faith throughout my week. These midweek vespers have revealed the fabric of Jesus' ministry throughout the gospels: Holy Conversations with religious leaders, roman empire, people in the crowd, and the disciples.

The funny thing about conversations is that when you have enough conversations with someone, you really get to know them. That's the best way to build relationships is to share in talking about our history, what encourages us, what our point of view is, our hopes and dreams. I suppose that is why reading the Gospels are so essential in understanding who Christ is, because they are mostly conversations with Jesus and the greater community, and the Gospels are the primary lot of recorded information we have regarding Jesus' Holy Conversations on earth before his Resurrection and Ascension.

When any of us puts in the time to have conversation, our relationships get past the superficial. Whether it's an acquaintance, colleague, neighbor, fellow parent at your child's school, co-worker, or stranger, if we invest time in conversation we begin to understand someone else's point of view. We learn what is important to them. We can in time, develop a more loving friendship or partnership, working and living with each other, deciding how to show up for one another in community.

When I consider the most important conversations, I cannot help but consider the gift of marriage, which is a strong example for how conversations can move from getting to know another person, to dedicating oneself to loving the other. A first date grows to shared conversation which later becomes a covenant which two people lovingly dedicate their work not only to their own aims but also to one another's hopes, dreams wishes.

Yet marriage is not the only exemplar of how conversations move to partnerships. In the church, in our commitment to one another as Christ's Body, we give collectively converse, organize, commit, and discern together, building relationships so that we might embody Christ's work in the world. Friendship is the highlight, a relationship Jesus used by calling his followers "friends". Although Friendship is not often guided by a written covenant like marriage, it is just as important as we invest in one another's wellbeing. Friendship is a gift we can give every day, and often is given in conversation with one another.

Holy Conversations, whether they are in friendship, marriage, or the larger community are essential to the life of faith, and we know this because Jesus spent so much of his time between

birth and his crucifixion talking with people. Jesus modeled that to be in relationship with someone means to give of our time for their benefit. And in this season of Holy Week, we all get the opportunity to spend some time with Christ, listen to him, because he is still speaking. We have the opportunity always through the work of prayer to do this, and it I believe is even more desirable this week as we journey with him to the cross. These conversations happen in worship, prayer, at the Holy Eucharist Table, in fellowship together as the Church.

When we reflect on these Holy Conversations of Jesus, the content is not always uplifting, encouraging, or positive. Sometimes these conversations are confronting, challenging and cause great pain. Jesus in his conversations acts as a teacher, healer— one who provides food and water to those who are hungry and thirsty. But Jesus also challenges in his conversations, the empire, and the religious elite, the people who call him King—a defiance to the governmental systems and a provocation to the establishment. The Holy Conversations Jesus encountered did not always end in loving kindness and healing. In today's gospel text there are conversations between the crowd and Pilate, between the officers and Jesus, between the others being crucified and Jesus which end in his torture.

The reality I think is the crowd and leaders didn't really know Jesus. In my pacifist leaning I like to think that if they really knew him, that they would love him, and if they really loved him, they would not crucify him. They surely wouldn't have tortured him in such a public way. Often if someone wants to harm another person, an essential precursor to that harm is the conscious or unconscious choice to choose to not know them vilify, dehumanize and degrade them. It is much easier to harm someone if there is a "testimony" against them... as Pilate alluded in vs. 13. Jesus is misunderstood and becomes a sacrifice in an unjust system and gathered crowd who call out for his death.

Fast forwarding in the story, it makes sense that he would later say on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34 NRSVUE)

I've been discussing those who wish to harm Jesus, who were in opposition to his work and ministry, but the ones who love Jesus don't get a free pass from the challenging Holy Conversations. We will hear those stories of faithful and unfaithful words through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Every good preacher will say this on Palm Sunday, don't miss the middle of the story. If you attend worship Palm Sunday and Easter and skip the other services, its like reading chapters 1-5 and 10-15 of a novel. Will you understand the whole narrative? Well, you can kinda piece together things, but if you want to really journey to Easter, you need the whole story. And conveniently if the 7p Thursday and 7p Friday services do not fit in your calendar, you can again watch the replay online.

The Story of Holy Week, the story of Christ's journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, to the grave to new life is a part of the bigger story, the Big story of all stories.

At the birth of Christ we read 1st chapter of John, where "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it."

When the gospel says all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being we understand that Christ was at the beginning of all things.

In Colossians 1:16, the epistle writer says, “for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.”

In our Nicene creed, which we will use this spring we proclaim that Jesus is, “begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” This is our trinitarian understanding, one God who we describe and seek to understand as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the Big Story of Jesus, we don’t just have a *moral figure* who taught peace and did good and was unjustly killed and brought to life again, but we have a fully human and fully divine, God on the cross, being tortured by the very humanity whom he created. He shared and showed love, and they destroyed the mortal flesh he inhabited.

It is not a surprise then, at the hour of his death we see not only his body and human response, but rather the whole created order responds. The curtain of the temple is torn, showing that the holy is no longer contained in the temple, but perhaps a showing that holiness is an experience that not only rests in the sanctuary with its confining elements, but for the whole world. We see these holy occurrences—an earthquake, tombs braking open and bodies are raised to life—showing us the mystery of the Resurrection to come later in the Big Story.

Because Christ is in All.

So the deer reality is if Christ is in all— then we are surrounded by the love of Christ wherever we go, despite the challenges of our world. There is no such thing as an Unholy Conversation because Christ is with us in the world. Jesus promised us wherever 2 or more are gathered, there I am with them. The Psalmist writes, “Where can I go from your presence, even in the depths you are there. Paul in his book to the Romans says Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?”

Christ is still speaking today.

And so the invitation today is to be in the conversation, by being present and listening to the words of Jesus through worship, by sharing in Holy Conversation with our Lord through prayer and spiritual disciplines, and an invitation to you today as you find yourself in Holy Conversation, or gathering with others this Holy Week set an empty chair, in a symbol of Christ being in conversation with you wherever you gather.

Christ is in All. Amen.