**Who Do You Say That I Am? Fourth Wednesday Service 7 p.m. March 25, 2020**

**Gathering Call** As Christians, we have been baptized into the death of Jesus so that we can rise to a new life in him. **Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?”** What will we do with this man who was falsely accused and suffered a rigged trial, was tortured by Roman soldiers, nailed to the cross, and then laid in a tomb, only to rise again three days later? **Again, Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?”**

**Our Lenten Cofession**

The sacrifice our God observes ia a genuine spirit, a contrite heart, Please God, hear as we honestly confess:

Dear Father, help us nail to the cross of your Son, the whole of our death: the wrong desires of the heart; the selfish plans of the mind; the corrupt apprehensions of the eyes; the cruel words of the tongue; and the wrong use of hands and feet.

Let the old self be crucified and done away, that the new being may live and grow into your likeness.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Hear the Lord your God speak, “Your sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake.” Grant this, O Lord, for all people. Amen! So be it!

**Scripture Readings**

## Matthew 27:45-56

## The Death of Jesus

 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. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

**Acts 10:1-8**

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o’clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius.” He stared at him in terror and said, “What is it, Lord?” He answered, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.” When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

**Who Do You Say That I Am?**

**Dialogue Portrayal – Cornelius**

*Trained as a professional soldier, he commanded at least one hundred men and possibly as many as one thousand men, was a “God fearing” man, a Military Christian.*

**Roman Centurion Cornelius – Dave Holland**

My name is Cornelius.

I am a Roman Centurion -- a member of the occupying force deployed to keep the peace in a foreign land, the Holy Land.

As a military leader of 100 hardened and highly trained soldiers of the Italian Regiment, I am an alpha male.

I am a successful career soldier who has to earned my position in order to keep it.

***There is nothing weak about me!***

I am used to command, to make decisions, and to be courageous enough to carry out my orders.

I know my responsibilities in the chain of command.

But I am also a humble seeker who is described as devout, God-fearing, a man of prayer, and generous to those in need.

Jesus said of such seekers: "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17).

When Procula, Pilate’s wife, came to me about Jesus of Nazareth I wasn’t surprised.

Evidently Pilate had noticed a change in me when Jesus transformed my life and must have mentioned it to his wife.

Pilate was pragmatic and not one moved to seek spiritual answers to life’s questions, but his wife, Procula, was a seeker.

I told her about Lazarus, about the healings, about the feedings, about the exorcisms, about the disciples and followers, and most of all, about Jesus.

Procula even asked me to arrange a private meeting with Jesus during the Jewish Passover in Jerusalem.

No one saw what was about to happen in Jerusalem.

Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, how he cleansed the Temple, but them public opinion turned against him with an arrest, trial, and sentence of capital punishment.

***I was heartbroken!***

The change that I thought was about to take place, the man who promised to make that change possible,was sentenced to death on a cross.

I asked Pilate’s permission to be the Centurion in charge of Jesus’ sentence of death…I hoped I could make it a merciful and quick death.

When I saw him…I was ashamed of what my fellow Romans has done…they beat him beyond recognition…I was shocked…I did not recognize him…except for his eyes…they looked as if he were carry all the trouble of the world on his shoulders.

It was then that I saw his mother, Mary, along with Mary Magdalene and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

It was then that I heard Jesus say, “Mother, here is your son.” And to James, “Here is your mother.”

It was then that I heard Jesus say, “It is finished!” And when he uttered those words…the sky turned dark and the thunder roared and the rain came down.

It was then that I said, “Surely, he was then Son of God.”

I thought my world was now absent of the ONE who would change it, turn it upside down, making it the loving place God intended.

I was like a boat drifting on a sea of misery…blown here and there by the wind of apathy…lost in my sorrow.

I was going through the motions of my job when the rumor of Jesus’ resurrection appearances came…and I little spark warmed my heart…but then I heard he ascended into heaven…and I was drifting again.

Such men are not normally visited by an angel in a vision at three in the afternoon, but I was.

This angel emissary came from my commander-in-chief, the Supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth gave me explicit orders to find Peter and bring him back to my house. I sent three of my men to Joppa where Peter was staying.

In the meantime Peter was experiencing another vision in which all the dietary rules he had been taught all his life as distinctive of his identity as an Israelite were swept away.

This signified that the barrier between Jew and Gentile was abolished through the Cross of Christ. The people of God are to be multi-racial and international. Then the Spirit commanded Peter to go with the three men I sent for him.

Entering my house, Peter found a large gathering of relatives and close friends.

***I fell at his feet in reverence.***

Peter the fisherman, not used to such honor from a Roman military official, made me get up.

Peter told us the good news of peace through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.

How God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power; how he was killed but God raised him from the dead and he was seen alive by witnesses; how he commanded them to preach to people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed judge of the living and the dead; and how all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

***A remarkable thing happened.***

The Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.

What had happened in Jerusalem at Pentecost, and in Samaria, now repeated itself in Caesarea in a military commander's house.

As Peter explained later to those who criticized him in Jerusalem: "If God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God."

So he baptized us with water as they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Peter established a church in my military household.

I knew all about war and keeping the peace.

What I didn't know and needed to know was that all the conflict in the world, and within each person, needed to be defeated, not by military arms, for that is temporary, but by the Prince of Peace.

 "Christ himself is our peace, making peace through the Cross. He came and preached peace to those who were far away and to those who are near" (Ephesians 2:14-17).

Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” My answer can only be, **“*Surely this man was the Son of God!”***

**The Prayers of Our Community**

O Lord, grant us a quiet night and peaceful sleep. **Dear Heavenly Father thank you for this journey of Lent. Thank you for our church family and the gift of traveling together as we grow closer to you. Help us to recognize your mercy, your acceptance, and your great love with lives that purpose-filled and joyful.**

Lord, we come before you, seeking your help. **Create growth in our lives. Lead us to new life. Help us to remove thoughts and activities that separate us from you. Give us courage to recognize them and to overcome them.**

May we take up our CROSS and FOLLOW Christ in the strength of patience, constant faith, and fellowship with him. That we may know the secret of his strength and patience. All of this we pray, in the name of our Savior, who taught us to pray…

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**C- Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy Name,
 thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
 as we forgive those
 who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever and ever. Amen.**

**Dismissal**

**It is good to give thanks to the Lord. To sing PRAISE to you name!**

**To herald your love in the morning. Your truth at the end of the day.**

**Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God!**

**Benediction**