

# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

## “FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING”

Scripture Lesson: Luke 19: 28-40

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, April 13, 2025  
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

### Luke 19: 28-40

#### Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that 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 heaven!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

#### Father, Forgive Them; For They Do Not Know What They Are Doing

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

As I was driving home the other day, I noticed some kids fishing in a small pond—their three bikes were laid out on the bank, and they were standing about, probably having as much fun talking as they were fishing. I certainly hope so, because I knew something they didn’t: there were no fish in that pond.

A movie came out in 2018 called *Instant Family*, and in it, Mark Wahlberg and Rose Byrne adopt three kids. As they become parents with hardly any preparation, they quickly encounter everything from temper tantrums to their first hospital visit—things about which they have no clue. It’s just chaos, and it is hilarious!

I suppose I shouldn’t point fingers, though. Those two small cacti plants I bought for my office—the ones that were supposed to be resilient and require very little water—well, apparently, they needed a little more water than I gave them.

I suppose that, at some level, none of us know exactly what we’re doing. Our issues may be failing to keep alive a plant that really doesn’t need a whole lot of help to live, or realizing that parenting is a lot harder than it looks. Though maybe a few of us have tried to fish in a pond with no fish.

Now, extrapolate that out—all the things we say and do, or fail to say and do—the countless ways we demonstrate in our life and in our living that we are not nearly as capable as we may think we are.

Friends, it was into that very completeness of human frailty that our Savior came.

Just a few days after the cheers of Palm Sunday had subsided, Jesus spoke these words from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

On that first Palm Sunday, people had come to the original Holy City from all over. As Jesus entered the city, the Bible tells us that “all Jerusalem came out.” They came out waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna,” which means, “O, save!” or “Save us now!” The people called Jesus King and spread their garments along his way. It was a joyous time—a time pregnant with possibilities and expectations. It was a parade of hope and glory and triumph, but did they really know what they were doing?

Here’s what they didn’t know: they didn’t know that the salvation they wanted was not the salvation that Jesus came to bring. The restored kingdom so many of them wanted was a kingdom of this world—not God’s kingdom—and none of them expected their king to wear a crown made of thorns.

In so many ways, they had no idea what they were doing. By Friday, many of the same crowd who shouted “Hosanna” would shout “Crucify him!” in less than a week’s time. Some of those same people who had waved palm branches would be washing their hands of Jesus, calling him a criminal, and watching him die.

And yet, from the cross, Jesus chooses to say, “Father, forgive them.” Jesus knows exactly what has happened. He knows how fickle we are. He knows the sins of the world. Jesus is fully aware of just how woefully short we fall of God’s glory, and yet he remains determined to pave the way of forgiveness—to create the means by which true reconciliation with God is possible.

In the world today, there is some sense of the goodness of people. And I get it—I look at the good in people as well. We should do that. But from a purely theological point of view, none of us are good!

At the end of last week, I attended the Ligonier Conference in Orlando, and one of the presenters harkened us back to the words of Charles Spurgeon. It was part of a broader talk about election and our sinfulness, and he said:

“I believe in election, because I know that I would have never chosen God. And I believe I was elect before I was born, because God would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.”

In the Presbyterian Church, we hold to John Calvin’s view of depravity, which basically means that we all sin and fall short of God’s glory. So, in a way, none of us really know what we are doing. To put it another way, there is no part of our life that does not have to deal with the reality of sin—and the harsh reality is that we cannot and will not ever get it right, no matter how hard we try!

And that’s not to say that we are out-and-out evil. I mean, the folks who gathered along the road as Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly—though mounted on a donkey—“evil” is probably not the first word that comes to mind.

One might say they were hopeful, or that they were expectant. Oh, but they were also misguided. They failed to understand Jesus’s messianic mission. They failed to see Jesus for who he was and what he came to do. And, if we are being honest with ourselves, most of the time, neither do we!

We cry “Hosanna,” but we do it on our terms. We ask Jesus to save us—but from what? Our sins? Or maybe those of our Republican or Democrat neighbors?

Do we want Jesus to change our circumstances? Our portfolio? Or do we want Jesus to change our hearts?

Oh, we want a king who will fix what we have identified as the rights and the wrongs in the world!

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

If we are being honest with ourselves, most of the time—our prayers and our lives—they tend to focus on what God can fix, and not on what God can forgive.

And make no mistake about it: forgiveness is what we receive as a result of Jesus’ atoning work on the cross.

Now granted, that wasn’t what most of those Passover pilgrims expected to see (and let’s not forget that it was, in fact, the Jewish festival of Passover that brought so many people to Jerusalem that day).

But no matter what brought them, the cross was not what they expected—not after that grand Palm Sunday processional.

But that's just it—in the cross, we don't get what we expect, and we certainly don't get what we deserve. But we do receive everything we need—even when we didn't know better!

Jesus' forgiveness—praise be to God—comes before our better understanding. It comes before we can respond. And that's what makes it grace. That's what makes it the Gospel.

At that time when we didn't know what in the world we were doing—perhaps not altogether different from today—"while we were yet sinners," the Bible tells us, "Christ died for us!"

In just a short time, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper, and we should keep in mind that when the disciples gathered around our Savior on the night of his arrest, they didn't know what they were doing either.

It was a Passover meal, to be sure—but it was also a new thing, a new meal. It would be for them, and for us, a Sacrament... but could they really understand that?

Think about it: Jesus was talking about death and dying from within the context of a meal that historically testified to God's mercy and provision.

Jesus knew the confusion that existed in their hearts. He also knew what else was going on within them. He knew what Judas was going to do—that Judas would betray him. And he knew what Peter would do—that Peter would desert him.

And yet Jesus chose to say, "This is my body, given for you. This is the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood, for you."

It was as if Jesus was saying: You may not know everything that is going on here, but I do. And I am doing this for you, because I love you.

With our palms this morning, we rightly celebrate a glorious day—Jesus' triumphant entry into the holy city of Jerusalem—but we also know something of what this next week brings: the pain and the agony, but also the resurrection!

Still, we do not know it all. We cannot comprehend what God has done from the beginning to the end. Ours will always be a mirror into which we see dimly. But at this table, our spirits are sustained—which makes that mirror a little less dim, because it is at this table where we are nourished to grow in grace... to learn, to struggle, and to know that we are loved.

Part of the joy of this table is that it has been prepared for those of us who aren't necessarily so strong and who haven't figured everything out. It is for those of us who may not have any idea what we are doing!

This table is for all those who wonder deep down inside, "How in the world can God love me? After all, I know myself. I know my sin."

Ah, but the miracle is... God knows it too. And God, in Jesus Christ our Lord, died to forgive it!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.