

16 Then Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified.

The soldiers took Jesus prisoner. 17 Carrying his cross by himself, he went out to a place called Skull Place (in Aramaic, Golgotha). 18 That's where they crucified him—and two others with him, one on each side and Jesus in the middle. 19 Pilate had a public notice written and posted on the cross. It read “Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city and it was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. 21 Therefore, the Jewish chief priests complained to Pilate, “Don't write, ‘The king of the Jews’ but ‘This man said, ‘I am the king of the Jews.’””

22 Pilate answered, “What I've written, I've written.” (*Common English Bible*)

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*“Hosanna!*

*Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Blessings on the king of Israel!”*

*Blessings on the king of Israel.*

So the crowd shouted when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem on that first day of his last week. They shouted while waving Palm branches. Palm branches were signs of victory. This man who raised Lazarus from the dead, he would free Israel from the oppression of Roman occupation. He was not a puppet of Rome. If he had power over death, surely he had power over empire. Surely he was the conquering king they had long desired. And now he's riding into the capital city, in time for Passover celebrations. Anticipation and excitement hang in the air.

*Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews*

Written in Aramaic, the everyday speech of the people of Israel in Jesus' day. Speaking plainly to the religious leaders who so recently declared “we have no king but the emperor.” Speaking plainly to the crowds who shouted out blessings on the king of Israel. These words hanging above a bloodied and broken body crowned with thorns... a knife to the gut of the people of Israel— This is what happens to your hope. This is what happens to your power. This is how pathetic you are.

*Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews*

*Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.*

Written in Latin, the Roman mother tongue, meant to be a joke, a barb, a means of shame and control... Pilate gets the last word, what he has written, he has written.

*Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.*

Written in Greek, so that the Jews home in Jerusalem for the Passover, and the Gentiles there for business, so all could take heed. This is a broken nation, a broken people, with a broken king. Don't even think of challenging Rome.

*Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.*

Written so all can read... and despite what the people thought they wanted in a king, and what Pilate meant by these words, and how these words felt to the Jewish people who read them... they speak truth. Jesus is enthroned on the cross. He is lifted up for all to see. He is named for all to understand. The Word made flesh, God with us, the true king of Israel, indeed the true king of creation. The King of the Jews is the King over all, the source, salvation, and sustenance of all that is. When Jesus is proclaimed the King of the Jews, in all the languages of the empire, he is proclaimed sovereign over all. Over those who betrayed him, denied him, cursed him, taunted him, mocked him, accused him, whipped him, abused him, crucified him— over Jews and Greeks and Romans. And with Jesus' body hanging on that cross, God is showing us something about how God rules... in self-sacrificing love, humility, vulnerability, in solidarity with the weak, the poor, the oppressed.

This Word, the Word made flesh, is the last and eternal word.