

I'm doing things a bit out of order this morning, with a few comments before the Gospel, rather than a lengthy sermon after the Gospel.

Every year on Palm Sunday this is the moment when we make a switch. We've been focusing on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But now we flick the switch, and start to focus on his passion and death.

This year we'll be reading the Passion account from Luke.

Each Gospel tells a similar story. But each has differing variations on the Passion, based upon the author's particular interests and themes.

Today, as we read through Luke's Passion, I would alert you to a few of the unique things Luke has to tell us about Jesus' nature and character, even, or maybe especially, in the face of death.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke has placed special emphasis on two great overarching themes. First, Jesus as healer. All the Gospels tell about Jesus' miraculous healings. But Luke places special emphasis on Jesus' healing ministry. Second, Luke shows us Jesus' concern for the marginal, the outcast, the poor, those on the fringes of society. Both of these themes will be present in Luke's passion. So today, listen for these special things.

All 4 Gospels tell us that when Jesus was arrested, Peter took out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. But Luke adds the wonderful detail of Jesus, in the midst of being arrested, reaching out his hand, and healing the man.

Later during the crucifixion procession, Luke tells us that Jesus will stop and talk to a group of women, a group normally on the margins of society.

Later, on the cross, Luke has two unique episodes. First is Jesus asking his Father to forgive those who are crucifying him.

Second is the wonderfully poignant story of Jesus embracing yet another outcast, one of the criminals being crucified next to him. Though his hands are nailed, the criminal reaches out to Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And our crucified Lord with his arms wide open in love, says, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

And when he has done all that, he places himself in God's loving arms: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

As we read and meditate together on Luke's passion, may you have a sense of God's love for you made known in the embrace of Jesus Christ. And may you be open to the healing and power that come from his cross.