Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The
texts for our message are the Gospel and Epistle for this day.

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote these words,
"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say
about Jesus: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to
be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said
would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who
says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell...Either this man (Jesus) was,
and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool,
you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and
God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about (Jesus) His being a great human
teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to..."

For the last few weeks the Gospel lessons have shown us Jesus beset and bothered by
questions from all sides by people who were struggling with what to do with Him— how to fit
Him into their scheme of things, their picture of the promises of the prophets and His proper
place, if any, in their world view. His triumphant entry into Jerusalem that Passover week had
placed Jesus front and center in the religious controversies percolating in Palestine. While we
have had weeks to consider the passages placed before us this all took place in the jam-packed
days we most often neglect in our Easter observation – Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of
Holy Week.

Think of the intensity - one moment Jesus is entering the city hearing Hosannas and
being proclaimed Messiah and King. The next He is cleansing the temple, overturning tables
and disrupting the lucrative Passover based business of temple tax money exchange and supplies
for sacrifices. People are drawn to Him and repulsed by Him. Everyone wants a Messiah but
maybe not this one – is He Lord, Lunatic or Liar?

An ordinary man would have had his head turned by all the attention or, perhaps, broken
under the pressure and taken to the hills but this was no ordinary man – this was the only
begotten Son of God surrounded by sinners clearly in need of a Savior. Even those who shouted
Hosanna and those following His every move like Palestinian Paparazzi hanging on His every
word and movement in the city – even his own disciples would soon desert Him. Oh, he would
head for a hill – the one named Golgotha, there to complete the sacrifice for sin for all of sin-sick
humanity of all time – we weary warped mistrusting and misguided men and women who have
always populated the earth since Adam’s fall.

Question after question comes at Jesus – every trick tried, every trap set and all the time
as He parries against each side-step and maneuver the answer was right in front of them!
“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your strength” Jesus gives in answer
to their question on the greatest command. God, incarnate was literally close enough for them to
touch – but they couldn’t bow and call Him Lord because they were afraid He was a lunatic or liar. “Love your neighbor as yourself” is the next part of His answer. Oh, he was “A ‘Nobody’ from Nazareth” to many but, in truth Jesus was God come near – near enough to be neighbor and friend but they couldn’t see it. How hard it is to imagine their blindness – or not?

It is difficult to imagine refusing love – the purest most powerful love ever to be, but in all honesty we all like to put conditions on our love, don’t we? We are leery of love given or received because everywhere we look love and relationships founded in love seem to be sickly or shattered. It was no different at the time of Jesus.

Marriages ended on a whim. Wives and children were cast into the street to fend for themselves or go into servitude or even slavery. Slavery was accepted in all societies. Women were possessions and could be disposed of. For the common person there was horrible hard work, poverty was always close at hand and they were constantly faced with horrible sickness and disease. That’s the mess of a world Jesus entered into.

Think of it - every moment of every day the sinless Son of God lived on this earth He saw and experienced the brokenness of humanity. How it must have hurt Him to hear the way people talked/still talk to each other. Paul tells us “love is patient, love is kind, love believes the best about others…” That was the love Jesus proclaimed – the love He shared and shares with us but let’s “get real” - that is not the love we see in our society even though we have social security, the best of health care and a high level of human rights. Believing the best about others? Patience? Kindness? Have you driven in traffic lately?

The chaos of a sinful world is not limited only to humanity. This last week I went to my godson’s wedding (David and Julia). Raised in the mission field of Papua New Guinea I had only seen him at age 2, 12 and now at 30. Wherever he’s lived he’s loved nature – he was a tow-headed barefooted boy of six when they headed to jungle training. They had to drag David from his native buddies and force his feet back into shoes when they moved to the mission compound. He still eats bugs and has large snakes for pets!

Living now 20+ miles outside of Tucson I went for a nature walk with his mom in the desert wilderness – not at all empty and bleak but full of life – birds nesting in holes in huge cacti, pack rat holes with escape routes for their use when snakes get hungry and “come calling.” There was coyote spoor, hummingbirds at the feeders, flocks of gold finches coming for seed, butterflies fleetly flying by the chartreuse bougainvillea. I even saw a robin but reminded myself Spring is not here and won’t be for a long time!

God’s creation is marvelous but it, too, groans and longs for Christ’s return when all things will be made new; when the original balance in nature intended by God will be restored in ways we can only dimly imagine. What we call acts of nature: hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, wildfires – well, they are unnatural – the whole world is not as God intended it to be.

The best we can do in the interlude is to tend to the brokenness of those around us as Paul and those ministering with him did so to the Thessalonians, gently, like a Middle Eastern
nurse/Amah cares for the children entrusted to her. These words hardly seem to come from the oft phlegmatic and peripatetic preacher Paul who says,

“So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.”

Jesus wasn’t able to gather the questioners who wouldn’t quit beneath His wings like a hen does her scattered chicks. In one final attempt to get them to confront whether He was Lunatic, Liar or Lord He turns the tables and asks them a question,

“What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?”

No fast-footwork, no parry or pounce from the Pharisees. We are told they were stumped,

No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The answer was right there in front of them – Jesus – Lord Jesus. Not a Lunatic, not a Liar but Lord and Savior. And now, at the very close of the sermon I’d like to get personal with what we’ve talked about today. What is it that keeps you or me – any of us – even those of us active in the body of Christ, the church, and in God’s Word from the power of the Gospel? Like those questioners of old you cannot see Jesus – all of God’s love and forgiveness come to us in human flesh – you cannot see Jesus as Lord and receive the Gospel unless you see your need. The Good News of forgiveness – the Gospel – cannot soothe your sin-sick soul until the Law has shown you that sin. That’s why we have Confession and Absolution, remember our baptism and come to the Lord’s Table.

Looking at our sins and shortcomings is painful but to know we are forgiven and loved – WOW that gives new life and fresh starts! Looking, really looking at the people surrounding us in our lives and seeing their need for love and forgiveness is exponentially more painful if you allow yourself to look and to long for, to pray for and to minister to their need. Opposition to the Gospel – “push-back” against love and grace – well, we’re told to expect it and to keep on giving that grace out in lavish ladles and daring dollops in all the places God grants for us to go so that in our witness people might see Jesus right before them, and by the power of the Spirit come to know Him as Lord! AMEN