Palm Sunday always presents a bit of a dilemma in regards to preaching because our reading is really, really long. If you want some fun facts (and I know you do) our Gospel reading contained 2,242 words. For comparisons sake my average sermon is around 1,400 words. Meaning that you already heard 842 more word than you usually hear on a Sunday. As a result, there is a temptation to simply say – “Yeah what John just said.” But then there is the guilt that comes and makes me feel like I am not doing my job. I mean if you can’t find something to preach on from 2,242 words I should probably find another job. So I think today I will split the difference and give more of a brief reflection rather than a full-blown sermon. What I want to touch on briefly is something that is fascinating in this story and that is the fickleness of those involved. We know it started with waving palms and it ends with the crucifixion. So somewhere something really changed.

I am sure that most of you have seen the movie *Casablanca*. In it the police chief Captain Louis Renault is something of a German lackey and is given orders to shut down Rick’s bar. When asked the reason he says, “I’m shocked that there is gambling in this establishment.” Immediately following this one of the workers at the casino comes and hands him cash and says, “Sir here are your winnings.” The main lesson that I have taken from this scene is that when you want to do something you find a way no matter how much you have to bend the truth. And this scene reminded me of the bits we hear about the assembly and Pilate. It reads, “Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.’" Now how much of this they actually believed I do not know, but we know they had already decided that Jesus needed to be crucified and all that was left was to find a reason to do it. Or put in the words of Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin’s sadistic head of secret police, “Show me the man and I'll find you the crime.” The Council found the man and then they found the crime.

Now I assume that most of you are not corrupt religious officials or sadistic heads of the Soviet Secret Police and so you might be asking yourselves what this has to do with me. Well, quite a bit I think. The lesson to learn is to be honest, honest not just with the world but also with ourselves. Jesus ends up being crucified because of a few compromises that a number of people made with the truth. The most likely reason Jesus was put to death was that he was inconvenient. Inconvenient to the way people thought and to the way people acted. How many things in life do we justify doing because doing the opposite would be inconvenient? And how many things do we make up to justify the avoidance of those inconvenient things? Part of being Christian is living in the truth and following wherever that may be. And this call to live in the truth may be difficult but it is ultimately liberating. As Harry Truman said, “If you don’t lie then you don’t have to remember what you said.” And so as we enter into Holy Week and see the wickedness that happened because of the bending of the truth we need to remind ourselves to live into the truth about who we are and who God is both now and forevermore.