

## 5.28.23 Sermon

# Symbols Matter | John 19:16-24

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

jesus, symbols, signs, king, religious leaders, people, 1930s, cross, howard thurman, pilate, perverted justice, god, talk, love, roman empire, jews, other nations, john, rejected, daughter

### SPEAKERS

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So good morning, the pressure mounts, pressure mounts. Given a word that is in season, and given a word that, for your life, for your life, it's always good to see each and every one of you and to have this time together with you to just to share the things that hopefully I share with you, that God has given to me that matches your life that you can take with you, as you continue to grow and develop and advance in this thing called life, with God, with God. So what are we going to talk about today. But before that, let me pray to God, I thank you for today. Thank you for this moment. I thank you for how you have allowed us to come together to be with you. And let this be a moment of experience in not only your word, but also your presence and your spirit. Guide us in all things in Jesus name I pray, amen. So, I have the opportunity today to continue in our conversation and discussion throughout the book of John. And we're in chapter 19, in the part of John 19, that we're in, in terms of the journey of Jesus's life is after he has been convicted by Pilate and the Roman Empire. But before he is on the cross, he's on his journey to the cross in this moment. And so there are some things happening. And we're going to talk about those things that are happening to Jesus now. As captured by his disciples, right. Yeah, we'll stay there this morning. Let's read. So we're going to do John light, I'm sorry, John 19, verses 16 through 24. And this is from the NRSV version. I'll stay away from King James because these endow sometimes can catch you. It says, Then he Pilate handed him Jesus, over to them, the soldiers to be crucified. So they took Jesus. And in Kerala cross by himself, he went out to what is called the place of the skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with him two others, one on either side with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross, It read Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. It was written in Hebrew, and Latin, and in Greek, Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write the King of the Jews. But this man said, I am the king of the Jews. Pilate answered, what I have written, I have written when the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for

each soldier. They also took his tunic now, the tunic was sinless woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for for it to see who will get it. This was the fulfill what was written in Scripture that says They divided my clothes among themselves. And for my clothes, they cast lots the reading of the word. So in this part of the text, there's so much symbolism and signs and markings that are going on. Right because this is a traumatic event and for any body that would have been there, this would have been stunning to see the Savior, or what was professed to be the Savior. Now going through this process of about to be killed, I can imagine that some of them were hopeful that, you know, at any minute, Jesus is gonna change this. At any moment, all the angels are going to come down and put it in to all of this. So there's this sinking feeling, as they're observing things unfold, that in their mind, can happen. This can happen to a savior, this can't happen to a Messiah. But here are all these things happening right in front of me. So I want to slow down and try to capture not only the things that John talked about this story, but from all the Gospels, because they're all seeing these pieces, and is affecting them in different ways, as they watch this unfold. Right. So in the telling of this story, after Jesus was convicted, and he's going to be crucified, they talk about a purple robe being put on them. It's a symbol of royalty. And then they talk about a crown of thorns, which is a symbol of a king. Then they talk about, he's put on a cross, the most disrespectful execution. Then they talk about the lashes on his back, which deforms the body. And in some cases, those that are convicted and get lashes died before they ever make it to the cross. Symbol, symbols, signs, then they talk about, you know, what was going on with the soldiers. They talk about the sign that was put on the cross above Jesus, right, so the Romans did this to make sure everybody knew what was the crime. And on that sign was Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Nazareth, a lonely place. A lonely place, King of the Jews, and offense to the Roman Empire, you are within my borders, there is one king. This is your offense, being put in the middle of two other criminals, that says You are the worst of the criminals that are on display today. These are all different signs and symbols that are being communicated out by different groups and different things that people see when they see Jesus. You're near the city. So it maximizes the message of what the Romans are trying to say. And then they put it in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, the three primary languages of the time, they wanted to make sure everybody who could read would read and know what they have to say. So what is a potential interpretation of all the symbols, not that we read as Christians, but as the Roman Empire? The Roman Empire, let's use that's blocked that trial, I want you to see a cross, let me use this one. Here is a person Jesus that's on this cross. That is from a lowest state called Nazareth, that has been positioned themselves as royalty. And we want you to know that the Roman Empire does not like this and that anyone who will position themselves in this manner, you will be treated as the worst criminal. This is a message that is going out that has been captured by the disciples. And guess who else is hearing this? The religious leaders so So remember, Barabbas was let go in exchange for Jesus. So they're signaling sending a signal to Barabas. command again, this is where you'll be anybody else, this is where you'll be. So these are traumatic signs and symbols that are going out that people are receiving. Why?

Because they see the situation differently from their perspectives, their expectations, and what's important to them in their life. So I sometimes have somewhat of sympathy for the religious leaders in this moment, as they're watching this and saying, I understand why now they want that sign down. Say that this man said, I am the king of the Jews versus King of the Jews, because I need to recruit someone else to take this spot. I need to find someone else. Because this guy seems to not be making it. Right? So there's these pieces. And why else, potentially? Now I don't consider myself a Jewish scholar by any means. This is just some general observations. Why else would they reject Jesus when they saw the miracles just like the disciples? Why did they refuse this king, this Messiah? What's happening was I said sometimes your expectation of the thing is based on your experience with a thing. They had an expectation of what their king what looked like they had an expectation of what that Messiah would look like. That Jesus wasn't matching. So what is that? Well, if you go back to First Samuel eight, when he received their first king, Saul, there was a certain personality of Saul, there was a certain request that the people made to God to Samuel, about a king. The people came to see because Saul's sons, they thought were being irreverent. They thought they were corrupt. And they said, saw your sons do not walk in your ways. They do. They're not good leaders. They have taken bribes. And they have perverted justice. So Samuel, give us a king. We want a king that will judge over us and so they look at Jesus, and Jesus doesn't seem to be judging over people. That's what the king was forced to do. This is the experience they've had. And then there's this other part about their king. Right, so So Samuel tried to convince the people don't get a king because of all of these negative things. And the people come back and say, Yeah, I get you sent me but we want to King. Not only do we want him to judge over us, we want him to go out in front of us to fight our battles and overthrow other nations and bring us glory. Jesus doesn't seem to be beating these guys up. He doesn't seem to be slaying people. And also they have a fear of people perverting justice. So what you and I may see as Grace they may see as perverted justice. How do you let a person caught in the act of adultery go? How do you engage with Roman soldiers son and heel Hill? Perverting justice? Can you see the difference in the events, depending on the seat, you sit? These are symbols and signs because it's almost impossible to hear the full story. So symbols and signs kind of fill in the gaps for us to help us to understand the full story, because you never ever have the time to hear the full story. So you get these little bits and pieces that kind of tell you something and you as the individual fill in everything else. Right, so So just some simple example, simple example, on this building. And the front is a sign that says Cornerstone Christian Fellowship. It announces to the world that this is a place where a group of people gather that some will call a church for worship The reason that sign is important is because this building was originally built as either a warehouse or manufacturing location. So when you drive around the outside, you may get confused about what's going on in there. And since the exterior design is industrial, industrial stuff is going on in there. Why not worship? In like manner, you may see a building with a steeple. In stained glass windows, in your brain fills in even without a sign it is what church signs in symbols in images help us to understand the world around us. But they

are all rooted in our own tradition. So what you see, you interpret, and what you interpret, could be incorrect. This is the challenge that the religious leaders are having an accepting Jesus as King and Messiah. This is the traumatic experience even for the disciples of how could Jesus be on a cross? I believe dumb. I'm here, but this madness has the stop. Get off that cross Jesus. What would you say? But signs, images. Also, the interesting part about the religious leaders rejecting Jesus is it so mirrors Samuel a. God tell Samuel, don't be alarmed. It is not you they've rejected they rejected me. So now, here it is, again. On the cross, Jesus, they're not rejecting you. They're rejecting God. Because in their mind is a certain way they have forgotten how God originally led them. God originally led them directly one to one. breaking them out of their problems and calamities. There was no filter, there was no king. Somehow, they were able to become great without all of that. But somehow they fell in love with the image of being like what other nations they started to. This is what I want. This is what I want. And so rejected. God, again, because of the signs and symbols and interpretation of those, and wanting to be great in the ways that other nations work great. Instead of how God defines greatness, how God defines greatness. And the dangers of signs and symbols. And our interpretations of that is this. Again, simple examples. Of you see a person walking up to a car and they pull out a pair of a set of keys and they unlock the door you assume, hey, this must be their car. They're not stealing it is their car. Could be rented, you don't know could be bound from a grant but the assumption is it's there's where you see two young people walk into a room and they greet each other and oh, they know each other. And then you may look closer and say, Oh, well, is their relationship family or their friends? Or, or what is it you have to start searching for additional information to come to a complete understanding? I remember one time it's kind of funny now, but I was upset then is I took my daughter out. Right? And we were kind of dressed up a little bit. Oh, Dad wants to take daughter out how do you go on a date and this is how you should be respected and so on and so forth. Right? Good thing that a dad does. What his daughter We go into this restaurant, we're talking, laughing, enjoying each other, and table over this group of women but my age with the sourpuss face on Oh, you know what happens next. And so they thought, here's this old geezer. Try to date this young woman. And it wasn't till they found out that she was my daughter, that they fix the face. Start modeling they own business. Sign, symbols, misinterpretations because you don't have all the information. And it's important to go further. And if it's outside your experience and traditions, you can have problems with this. If it wasn't for the fact that was my daughter there, I would have had some words to say. Right? So how does this affect us? How does this, these these misinterpretations impact our life in Christ impact our religious walk. You guys have heard me quote, Howard Thurman here from time to time, just I really love his thinking and how he approaches a relationship with God. And he was developing and growing in the 1930s. He was one of the mentors, Martin Luther King, Jr. in travelled to India in the 1930s, to meet Gandhi. And he knew before he got there, that he would be challenged on his support of Christianity as an African American male living in the US in the 1930s. So I'm gonna try to be delicate with this next part of the description. So if you're familiar with US history, you know what was going

on in 1930s in the US, things about segregation, things about lynching things about you can, you know, you can talk a lot about some of the atrocities that were going on within the country in the country was considered a Christian nation. So he knew he was going to get pushed back when he got to India. About why are you here telling us about Christianity? The Sign of the Cross that you profess is about love and liberty and kindness to humankind? How does that apply to people of a darker skin around the world? He knew this question was coming. So he gathered together his friends and talked about and say, What are we going to do? Because we will be true to our convictions, we will be true to the word, we will be true to our mission of mercy. So they went around months, thinking about how they would address this. And they came up with a way and they went to India, and he's making his first speech, and the first speech and he goes backstage. And of course, it's one of the first questions that comes up, said You seem like a fairly intelligent man. So I feel compelled to ask you this question. How is it not an offense? That you would be here telling of the goodness of Christianity, when you can't even go home and experience what you say it? Whoa. So the symbol of love and kindness that all the Christians around here are embracing around the world, they're looking at it and going, well, what are you doing? Only someone like Howard Thurman could have addressed that question. And so that I have to acknowledge but he said something that I think that was so profound and it starts like This he started even like the sons of Samuel, do not take the failings of man to be the failings of God. Number one, and then two, I make a king distinction between Christianity and the religion that Jesus started. The label we took call Christianity came from people observing people who follow Jesus and follow Jesus. They were not defined by nationality or nation, they were defined by their actions, regardless of the traditions they came from. So like I said, Only someone like Howard Thurman could have put this together, I would have been shook. But why is that important to us today, and specifically Cornerstone Christian Fellowship. We strive in every way to be diverse. In every way, every creed, culture background, because the symbols that we put out, are either building or taken away from Jesus Christ, you may not want the weight of that authority and of that reality. But society will not lose you from this thing. That the moment you put on the banner, label, the sign the signals that I am Christian, there is an expectation of you. And I want you to embrace that expectation. I want you to embrace the symbol that you are simply by breathing each and every day. How you walk, how you talk, how you greet people, how you love on people, how you disrespect people, are all a symbol of Christ. Why? Because you say you what, Christian? Now I know that's a heavy burden. And I know we miss it. Well, I miss it every day as my wife every day. But then what do we do? And it also is important that the diversity of our organization and of our fellowship, because you see things from different angles, just like the disciples did. Even some of the things that I've said here this morning, each of you heard it a different way. But the goal is did you see Jesus on the cross? And can you interpret that for those who think like you for those with your experiences, a both love and shame. Can you take the religion of Jesus and inspire somebody else's life? Because even if we talk negatively about the religious leaders of the time, one thing they clearly showed was they were hungry for

a messiah. Even going all the way back to John one, they sent people out to see John the Baptist. Why? Because he was doing good and they asked John, are you the one people are looking for what is the one that I can believe in? That won't be perverted. That won't take advantage of me. Who understands me? Is Jesus the one no masking a lot of masking take up your cross take up your cross and interpret for the people who you can reach impact