

“Jesus’ Passion For You”

Luke 23:1-56

Our Gospel lesson for today was very long, and it is rich with many different episodes that happened during Christ's period of tremendous suffering that we celebrate as Holy Week. Now, since today is Palm Sunday, you might be asking some questions about the choice of this appointed Gospel lesson.

Why isn't the Gospel lesson the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem? Why is all of Luke Chapter 23 included in the lesson? Why are we hearing the Passion reading? That is for Good Friday, isn't it? This Sunday is historically called Palm Sunday. It is all called the Sunday of the Passion.

We begin Passion Week. Passion, in its proper understanding, usually involves suffering. Passion is a love or desire that consumes you and compels you to act, even if it will bring suffering. Jesus went through His Passion because He has passion for you. He is consumed with the desire to save you. This desire compels Him to remain silent before His accusers. It compels Him to endure the humiliation of being mocked, beaten, spit upon, and nailed to a cross.

Such was His passion for you. For those who are confirming the faith of their Baptism tomorrow/today, and for all of you who have stood before God and His church and confessed your faith, you too are

to be filled with passion. Faith creates passion. Belief in God that does not inspire passion is merely “head knowledge.”

Over the past couple years, as I have been teaching the members of this year’s confirmation class, they have received a good deal of knowledge into their head. A week ago Friday night at our house and last Sunday here in God’s House, they displayed, exceptionally well, their knowledge of God, His Word, and the explanation of God’s Word in Luther’s Small Catechism.

But having all of those right answers is not faith. You had faith before you ever opened up Luther’s Small Catechism. Faith came to you in Baptism. For most of you, as you were baptized as a small child, you could not articulate that faith. You could not speak of the mysteries or the majesty of God. But faith was there. The Word of God joined with that water is what changed you. Your Old Adam drowned in the waters of Baptism. As you confirm the faith of your Baptism, you celebrate that the old you drowned and died.

I would love to create greeting cards for Baptism and Confirmation that really say what we are celebrating. There is no reason to smooth over or not talk about the ugliness of sin and the death that sin always brings. It is appropriate that we read of the Passion of Christ as we hear God’s children confirm the faith of their Baptism. You were crucified with Christ and buried with Him in Baptism.

But it doesn’t end there. You were raised to a new life. Baptism is a drowning. There is first greeting card idea. It is also a new birth.

It is the first time you were raised from the dead. It will not be last. This understanding of what God has done for you is best received when you have the faith of a small child. When we get into trouble is when we try to overthink and rationalize everything with all of our head knowledge.

In Baptism, you drowned and died. This is good. You have been reborn in water and the Word. We gather today and celebrate the death of the Old Adam. And we gather and celebrate the death of the Second Adam. It is the blood of Christ, the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, it is the blood He shed that washed you clean.

You wear white robes just like the saints in heaven – just like the ones of whom John writes and says, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

The white robe of Baptism you wore many years ago, the white robe of Confirmation (which many of us also wore many years ago); it is a symbol of a greater reality. There is a robe you are wearing right now. In the sight of God, you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. His blood has covered your sin. The centurion witnessed the death of Christ and said, “Certainly this man was innocent.”

Thankfully the centurion was wrong. This man, Jesus Christ, was guilty of your sin and mine. We witness the white robes of the confirmands, and we are tempted to say, “Certainly, these five people are innocent.” Certainly, I know better than that. Trust me.

They are not innocent. But, in Christ, because of the faith of their

Baptism, they are declared “not guilty” by God Himself. They have been and remain covered in the blood of Jesus Christ. This is not “head knowledge” that helps you pass a test. This is the reality of the passion that God has for each of you.

In a few moments, I will ask them a question. I will ask several questions, but this one speaks of passion. I will ask, “Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And they will answer, “I do, by the grace of God.”

They will confess before God that they would rather suffer (passion leads to suffering); they would rather suffer, even death, rather than fall away from the faith of their Baptism which they now confess. This is not merely head knowledge. This is faith in Christ. This is faith in His Passion, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection from the dead. Because “just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity” so will you rise and live for all eternity.

We gather this day to talk about death and new life – the death of your Old Adam in Baptism, and the death of the Second Adam as Christ endured His Passion. Where God is present, new life is always found. We celebrate the new life in Christ we have in God’s Church on earth as the faith of Baptism is confirmed in our confession. And we celebrate the eternal life in Christ found in the resurrection. There is always going to be suffering as we journey in this sinful world. Remember that Christ’s Passion is for you. Amen.