

“Our Passover Story”

Sunday of the Passion

Palm Sunday, year C

Luke 22:14-23:56

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Every year as Palm Sunday rolls around, I watch the Cecille B. DeMille epic movie *The Ten Commandments*. It started as a family tradition where we gathered around the television sharing popcorn and discussing our favorite parts during commercial breaks. As family members moved or passed on, watching the movie became a link to missing loved ones. Over time, I began to see how the yearly retelling of the Israelite Exodus and Passover, echoes our own Christian Passover story that we tell every year during Holy Week.

Holy Week rips off the veil through which we tend to view Jesus's last three days. Often, we sugarcoat Jesus's sacrifice and what his early disciples experienced, forgetting the reality that was endured. Holy Week has a rawness that reminds us that following Christ isn't a life of luxury and ease. It reminds us that there is more to Christian living than professing that we are a Christian and then going about our daily lives as if the word means nothing more than card to be played when it is convenient to meet our own ends and desires. The yearly retelling of Jesus' final days grounds us as Christians as we recall our journey from sin and death into a new life of grace and unconditional love.

Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. The Passion story is our story. In it, we find ourselves - our feelings, our struggles, our sense of belonging, even our brokenness. It resonates within the core of our being as our own lives are reflected in the coming days. Holy Week takes us on our own epic journey to freedom.

Today is the beginning of the journey. It begins as an unpretentious, quiet donkey ride into the dusty streets of Jerusalem becomes a chorus of voices, our voices, shouting, “Hosanna!”. On Thursday, when the hour has come to share the Passover meal, we find ourselves in the upper room. The crowds have gone home. Now it is just us and Jesus. He humbles himself by kneeling on the ground to wash our dirty, callused feet. At the table, he takes a loaf of bread, breaks it, looks us in the eye, and says to us, “This is my body, which is given for you.”

For you. This is getting personal now. There is no hiding in the crowd so that we can duck out without being seen. No tucking our feet under the bench and avoiding eye contact when Jesus

asks us to remove the protective armor of our shoes, to set aside our pride, and become vulnerable. Jesus looks us in the eye as he holds the broken bread saying, “This is for you. I give it to you freely, because I love you.”

When the meal is done, we head to the Mount of Olives or in the other Gospels, the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, in the quiet dark of night, Jesus asks us to pray, staying with him as he goes a little way off to say his own prayers to his father in heaven. But we are tired. The day has been long, our tummies are full, and all we want to do is to put our feet up and rest awhile.

Jesus has given us all that he is. He has shared our joys, our sorrows; held our hand when we needed comfort; been present for us when everyone else left us abandoned. Is it really too much to ask of us to give one hour of our time, to stay awake as we are present with Jesus through the night at his time of trial?

As Friday rolls around things turn ugly fast. Betrayal, violence, denial, pain, and death. Now our resolve as a follower of Christ is tested. Jesus isn't the only one on trial. Who are we on this day? Are we Judas coming to Jesus looking for a better life, doing all that is asked of us, but still feel like we get nothing in return because Jesus doesn't do what we want him to do? Do we try to re-brand Jesus into something that he isn't? Do we feel betrayed by God and in return betray Jesus? Maybe we are Peter. Unshakable in our faith and devotion to Jesus until... until our world is turned upside down. Until we face the moment when our words must turn into actions that declare our commitment to unconditional love of God and our neighbor. Or are we one of the many who demand proof of Jesus' divinity?

The last few hours of Jesus' earthly journey are reflected in the fourteen stations of the cross. We are there as our Lord is crucified. As we progress through each step to the tomb we begin to feel the weight of the beam. The tears of the women become our own tears wetting our cheeks. We are confronted with our own complicity in things that cause harm to others. The grief of our own losses. Our own mortality. We wonder how we can get through every day without those whom we love.

But we are resurrection people. Our eyes are fixed on the third day, towards the hope of the resurrection. On Saturday night as the sun goes down, we gather for the Great Vigil of Easter. We move from darkness to light, from death to life. The wondrous A-word, that means 'praise the Lord', returns with the ringing of bells in joyous celebration. We were lost but now are found. We felt dead inside but now have new life in Christ. The power of Christ's transformative love fills us with hope and purpose. This joy carries over into Easter Sunday and beyond, like a never-ending party.

Our desert wandering is coming to an end. Each person's journey to freedom is their own. In our own time, we will all find our way home as we move from the darkness that binds us to The Light that frees us and surrounds us with unconditional love. While Holy Week is just beginning, it is the last stanza of an Easter hymn that keeps running through my head:

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Jesus' touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again like wheat that springeth green. (Crum)

Amen.

Works Cited

Crum, John Macleod Campbell. "Now the Green Blade Riseth from the Buried Grain."
Hymnal 1982. The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985. Hymn 204.

The Ten Commandments. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. 1956.