

Sermon for Sunday, March 25, 2018 - “A Day for Passion”

Palm Sunday - Sunday of the Passion
March 25, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Marion Pruitt-Jefferson

Scriptures for the day: Mark 11:1-11, Psalm 31:9-16, Philippians 2:5-11, Mark 14:1 - 15:47

Beloved of God,

Grace and Peace to you in the name of Jesus.

Yesterday was a day of Passion – passion expressed across our country and even around the world. Yesterday we saw hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people – many of them not even old enough to vote - take to the streets and march. They carried signs and banners, and they cried out, “Enough is Enough!” Their passionate desire for real change was forged in deep grief – it was born of suffering and death brought about by the violence of a young man who possessed a deadly weapon.

Today, across our country and around the world, is another day of Passion. Christians have gathered far and wide to take to the streets in a different kind of march– waving palm branches and passionately shouting, “Hosanna to the King of David!” And even though we don’t cry out, “Enough is Enough”, or shout our demands for change, still, that is what we come seeking – that deeper transformation that can move us from hatred to love ... from selfishness to selflessness ... from pride to humility ... from shame and guilt to freedom and new life ...

Which is why on this day we enter into that story that we call “The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is THE central story of our Christian faith – the story of Jesus’ suffering and death. It is this ONE story that reveals the deeper meaning of all the other stories we have heard, not only the stories from scripture, but the stories that shape our own lives. It is THE story that has the power to change everything – the power to transform even death into new life.

We are confronted each day with stories of human suffering that seem to challenge the truth of God’s abundant love and care for us and for all creation. The story of the shooting at the Parkland, Florida, high school is one such story. And there are more: the terrorist attack in France, the continued bombing of civilians in East Ghouta in Syria, an innocent young black man senselessly shot dead in his grandparents backyard, package bombings across the city Austin, Texas. Then there are the stories that mark our own lives – places where we have experienced suffering, pain and loss.

In the story of Jesus’ passion and death on the cross, the mystery of God’s way of loving us through suffering and death into newness of life is revealed. This is why we so urgently need to hear the Passion Story on this day. For it is in Jesus’ suffering and death that we see that other PASSION – the passionate, loving heart of a God who enters fully into our human experience

and who takes all of our suffering, our despair, our pain, and even our sense of abandonment upon himself.

This is a day for PASSION – The passion of the crowds who so enthusiastically greeted Jesus and then turned away and with equal passion cried out, “Crucify Him!”; the passion of the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus’ body for burial; the PASSION of Jesus who suffers the betrayal and abandonment of his friend, who endures the humiliation of a rigged trial and condemnation of his own religious community, who endures the physical and psychological pain of torture and execution and the overwhelming sense of abandonment, even by God. And finally, the PASSION of our God who loves us with such fervor and determination, such tenderness and care, that nothing in all creation can ever, ever separate us from that saving, transformative, life-giving love.

The procession with Palms leads us directly into the heart of the mystery of our faith – the mystery of a suffering, dying Lord whose glory is the cross, whose power is made perfect in human weakness, and whose death gives life to the whole world. It is this mystery that we participate in each Sunday as we gather at this table to eat the bread of life and drink the cup of blessing, which are for us Jesus’ own body and blood. Today, may the hearing of this story and the sharing in this meal draw you ever closer the passionate heart of God.