

Weekend of the Passion (RCL/C): "It's Personal"

Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56

April 12-13, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's **personal**: this "old, old story of Jesus and His love." Some of you have heard this story **many** times and remember **many** details. Others know the broad outline of the story but wouldn't want to be quizzed on it. We hear the Passion narrative every Palm Saturday and Palm Sunday, either from the Gospel of Matthew, Mark or Luke. Each Good Friday we hear the Passion according to St. John. There are many similarities but also interesting differences. Today we hear the Passion according to St. Luke. Afterwards I'm going to ask you what person, event, or words spoke to you most clearly this year. We believe and anticipate that "*the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword....*"

(Hebrews 4:12 NRSV) God intends God's Word to pierce our heart. *The Message* puts it this way:

... [God's] powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. Nothing and no one can resist God's Word. We can't get away from it—no matter what. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit has something to say to us as we listen to today's Gospel.

Wonderfully, miraculously, the Holy Spirit tailors the message to each one of us. The story of the Passion of our Lord provides new soul treasure each time we hear it. Like a true classic, there are new gems to be mined every time we read it. The last time we heard a Passion story was a year ago, and the last time we heard this particular one was three years ago. We've all experienced a lot in the past year, not to say three years. So may we hear this "old, old story of Jesus and His love" with new ears and listen to it with a new heart, "*[without] doubt or defense, [laid]... open to listen and obey.*"

[Passion reading follows.]

What **moved** you? What touched you deeply? What **warmed** your heart or made your blood run **cold**? What convicted you? What puzzled you? What will you carry away as a treasure, a light in the darkness, a beautiful insight or a challenge to change?

I personally always come back to the same sad and magnificent detail. St. Luke is the only evangelist who describes Jesus' eye contact with Peter across the courtyard after the three-fold denial.

*...Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. **The Lord turned and looked at Peter.***

My *Celtic Daily Prayer* book says, "Everything was in that look: disappointment, love, forgiveness. One look, and [Peter] was perfectly known, perfectly discovered."¹

Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60-62) (The Message simply says, "He went out and cried and cried and cried.")

William Barclay, a famous student and teacher of the Bible, has said, "The penalty of sin is to face, not the anger of Jesus, but the heartbreak in his eyes."²

Remember how Jesus said to Peter at the Last Supper,

"Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your own faith may not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32)

In the same sentence, Jesus reveals He has prayed that Peter **won't** fall through the diabolical sieve of temptation that Satan will shake, that He knows that Peter **will** fall, regardless, and that Peter will also "turn back" (the literal meaning of *repent*). Jesus then plants the seed that Peter should then "*strengthen [his] brothers.*" Afterwards Peter immediately remembers the prediction of the denial, and in his bitter weeping flow the tears of repentance. I found a little prayer that piggybacks on this verse. It is a heartfelt plea for clear vision to see our sins and for hearts that seek forgiveness. I will pray it this Holy Week:

Take me often from the tumult of things into Thy presence. There show me what I am and what Thou hast purposed [intended] me to be. Then hide me from Thy tears.³

The Lord has so much to say to us. We have so much more to bring before the Lord: for blessing, for forgiveness, for healing, for insight. Don't leapfrog from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Come back this coming Thursday, Friday, Saturday evening at 7:30 p.m. for one service over Three Holy Days: the Triduum,

beyond Lent, time outside of time as we revisit the mysteries of our salvation and continue to explore the “old, old story of Jesus and His love.” On Maundy Thursday we receive absolution of our sins for the first time since Lent began, we enact the footwashing St. John describes in the 4th Gospel, we hear again the new commandment (*mandatum*) that we should love one another as our Lord Jesus has loved us, we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, obeying the command that we should bless the bread and wine “in remembrance of [Him],” and we strip the altar in preparation for Good Friday. On Good Friday evening the Tenebrae service includes song, Scripture about our Lord’s suffering and death, the extinguishing of candles and the adoration of the cross. On Holy Saturday the Great Vigil of Easter begins in our little cemetery with the blazing forth of the Easter fire, the lighting of the new Paschal candle and procession into the darkened sanctuary, candle lighting during the singing of the Easter solo, the Exultet, Scripture summary of our salvation history, holy noise resolving into the Gloria, the glad return of alleluias, the sound of the trumpet, the blaze of light, the celebration of the First Eucharist of Easter, and Break-the-Fast reception afterwards. We’ll worship on Easter morning, too, 8:45 and 10:30, as usual, but: “Miss the Triduum, miss a lot.” Amen

¹ *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayer and Readings from the Northumbria Community* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002), p. 572.

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 270.

³ *Ibid*, *Celtic Daily Prayer*, quoting *Hebridean Altars*.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham