

5th SUNDAY IN LENT
March 25, 2012

The Passion of Our Lord

FIRST UNITED

METHODIST CHURCH

An Open-Spirited Community of Faith and Action
Larry Moffet, senior pastor



*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

- Psalm 23:6

There's a reason we read this Passion story every year. It's too easy to forget how all the details of the story work together. To make it more "manageable," we tend to treat this story as a series of isolated events.

And the Passion Story connects details of Christ's life with the details of our lives.

We're not the only generations tempted to forget who we are and whose we are. The followers of Christ in Ephesus were amazing. They were among the first Christians to form strong community. Living in a major city of the Roman Empire, they showed faith and tenacity. Then they lost energy. They lost their passion. Their story haunts me. It is very similar to ours.

In his letters Paul and his followers praise the Church at Ephesus:

**"Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus
and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for
YOU, -Ephesians 1:15-17 (NIV)**

A few short decades later, John writes about a different spirit in Ephesus:

**"I know your deeds, your hard work... You have persevered
and have endured hardships for my name...**

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love... Rev. 2:3-5

There's a reason we call this story "The Passion."

It connects us with our first love. You remember the verse from I John:

"We love because God first loved us."

That is Passion.

Listen to the Passion with your heart. The Passion is self-giving action. As with every true love, it is the "Little things that matter." Notice how each detail in the Passion reveals Divine Truth. Today and in Scriptures during Holy Week, every detail brings us back to our "First Love." For example:

- Jesus never over-reacts to conflict: When religious authorities say "Tell your disciples to be quiet" he says "If I do, the stones will shout."
- Jesus always engages the reality of the moment: "Judas, go and do quickly what you are going to do."
- On Maundy Thursday, we will hear how Jesus' actions change the reality between God and Humanity: "I no longer call you servants, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; I call you my friends because that is what you are."
- Jesus stays on the path of self-giving love in the face of power that converges against him—religious leaders, Jewish King Herod, and Roman Governor Pilate.
- On Good Friday, we will hear Jesus pray for forgiveness of those who crucify him: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do."
- Today we will see how that love reaches out and claims a foreigner, a Roman Army leader. It is the Centurion who articulates faith in Jesus: "Truly this man is the Son of God."

Every detail of this Greatest Story Ever Told reflects challenges and struggles we face. The truth is in the details.

**The Passion is self-giving action-Love expressed
in self-giving action.**

The writer of Hebrews tried to encourage weary Christians, struggling with realities of their time, by reminding them Jesus was an outsider, too:

**Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify people b
y his own love.**

**¹³Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear
the abuse he endured.**

**¹⁴For we have no lasting city, but we are looking
for the city that is to come.**

**¹⁵Through Christ, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice
of praise to God.**

God never gets tired – of any of us.

The prophet Jeremiah saw God’s self-giving action at work in the worst of times. He said that even during the most challenging events God was hard at work making the people’s hearts new:

³⁷This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

**³⁴No longer shall they teach one another,
or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me...**

Jesus uses a metaphor that makes sense to all of us who love to watch things grow:

**²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls
into the earth and dies,**

it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

**²⁵Those who cling to their life lose it, and those who give up their life
in this world will keep it for eternal life.**

**²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me,
and where I am, there will my servant be also.**

Did you hear that last verse in today’s Gospel reading?

**³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw
all people to myself.”**

That tells us how the Passion of Our Lord works:

Jesus does not force, or bribe, or dazzle. He draws people to himself.

And here is the beauty of the Passion of our Lord. Christ’s Passion becomes our passion. We may not have to suffer. We do become part of his self-giving action That’s the reason they call this The Passion.

**Jesus is anointed at Bethany
Judas agrees to betray Jesus
Passover – Lord’s Supper
Peter’s denial foretold
Jesus prays in Gethsemane (Mount of Olives)
Betrayal and arrest**

UMH p. 288 v. 1 Were You There

**Jesus before the Council
Jesus before the Roman Governor, Pilate
Soldiers mock Jesus**

*UMH p. 288 v. 2 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree
Crucifixion*

The Roman Centurion says “Truly this was the Son of God”

UMH p. 288 v. 5 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb

**What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying passion, thy mercy without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.**

This is more than a strategy, This is more than tips on effective leadership.

This is the very nature of Divine love: to stand in the face of overwhelming events, choosing not to react; instead, choosing to respond, with redeeming acts.

The Passion of our Lord draws us and all people to the very heart of Christ.

I have called you by name from the very beginning.

You are mine and I am yours.

I have knitted you together in your mother’s womb.

I have carved you in the palms of my hands;

hidden you in the shadow of my embrace.

I look at you with infinite tenderness.

I guide you at every step. You belong to me. I

am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover, your spouse. Yes, even your child. Wherever you are I will be.

Nothing will ever separate us. We are one. –Henry Nouwen

Christ’s passion is our Passion

The Passion of our Lord is our passion. We are one.

**Lent is a time to open up space for God to work
in us and in the world.**

**We do that by 3 simple practices in Lent: we pray,
we fast, we give.**

**They open up space for our hearts to better understand
who Christ is and how Christ works.
As we walk with Christ through his struggles,
and share his Good News of new life
we become participants in the Divine Nature.**

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord.

³³This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

³⁴No longer shall they teach one another,

**or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord;
for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.**

HEBREWS 13:12-15

Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify people by his own love. ¹³Tet us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. ¹⁴For we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. ¹⁵Through Christ, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God.

GOSPEL JOHN 12:20-32

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.

²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who cling to their life lose it, and those who give up their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.” ²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Abba God, save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Abba, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

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Worship on Sundays: 8:30 & 10:45 a.m.