

**Sermon: Passion + Passion = Compassion****Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: April 2, 2023**

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We are now in what has traditionally been called Passiontide, the days after Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead when we say his passion begins, the agony in the garden, the betrayals and arrest, the trial before the Sanhedrin and Pilate leading to his crucifixion and finally his death. The passion of Christ. It's an interesting word, passion is because it has two somewhat contradictory meanings. The word comes from the same Latin root that the word passive arises from, so passion means that which is suffered or done unto us. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus predicts his own passion – "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed." But a more familiar to us these days of the word passion is almost the opposite – an active outpouring of emotion or a strong enthusiasm or desire for something. I am passionate about this that or the other thing. Maybe you've heard the famous quote of Howard Thurman who wrote "don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." The world needs passionate people. That's all in that little word of "passion": suffering unto death and coming fully alive.

So here on Palm Sunday, as we remember Jesus humbly entering through the gates of Jerusalem on a donkey and we've joined the throngs welcoming him as Savior, Redeemer, Messiah, we do so with the fuller awareness of what this entrance really means, which is the beginning of his passion. And this also marks

the beginning of what we call Holy Week. So I'd like to pose to you 2 questions to take into this week, 2 questions that Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem asks us in our own lives, for on this day of days Jesus is entering through the gates of your own life and soul and it involves your own passion and your passion, in both senses of that word.

First of all, Jesus entering into Jerusalem on a donkey is a sign of humility and submission. Some assumed as it had been taught in scripture that when the Messiah would come he'd be coming in great power and might leading legions of heaven to fight a great battle that would overthrow the powers of evil in the world and re-establish God's reign, the new age of justice and peace. Some say that's why Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities because he was a Zealot who believed that the end of time was at hand and involved a violent overthrow of the evil power of Rome and so he went to force Jesus' hand by turning him in. When he witnessed Jesus' meek submission even unto his crucifixion and death, he was so devastated with how wrong he had gotten it that he killed himself. But also in the Hebrew scripture that we call the OT, there was another strain of prophecy that spoke of the Messiah coming not as a great King or military commander to violently overthrow the powers of evil but as what? A suffering servant. The Prophet Isaiah wrote some 700 years before Jesus these words by which later Christians would understand why Jesus had to suffer and die:

He was despised and abandoned by men, a man of <sup>4</sup>great pain and familiar with sickness; And like one from whom *people* hide their faces, He was despised, and we had no regard for Him. <sup>4</sup> However, *it was* our sicknesses *that* He Himself bore, And our pains *that* He carried; Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, Struck down by God, and humiliated. <sup>5</sup> But He was <sup>4</sup>pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our

wrongdoings; The punishment for our <sup>6</sup>well-being *was laid* upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the wrongdoing of us all To <sup>7</sup>fall on Him. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

The very definition of passion. And that is what we hold before us this Holy Week, this image of the suffering that Jesus passively underwent in his giving over of his life to God and God's purposes and so Christ suffered and died out of love for us.

So the first question is this: What is it that you are fighting against in your own life, resisting, or struggling with that you need to let go of, surrender to, submit to? Submission is not a very in-vogue term these days and it is dangerous I'll admit because one must be careful not to submit to the wrong thing or be submissive to the wrong thing but it is a critically important concept as we consider what it means to follow Jesus and to worship God. And it could be argued that if we don't work to submit to God then we'll find ourselves necessarily and inevitably submissive to something less than God. So, what is that you are fighting against, resisting, contending or doing battle with in your life that you need to submit to God and allow God to handle because you cannot and only God can? What comes to mind? What have you been anguishing over and thinking only one way about and that one way involves your own willfulness and strength and resolve and effort... and can you take that and whatever in you rails against it, can you get on the donkey and ride right into the gate of your fear or pain and submit it to God as your passion? And what you might need is a friend, a spouse, a spiritual director, a pastor, to help you even see that there's another way possible here, so locked down can we become to our single-minded

understanding of how we must address what it is we face with willfulness and strength and alone. But if only for this Holy Week maybe just be with Jesus and ask him to accompany you in this passion, this suffering of yours and give yourself to it as a prayer to the God of your life.

Ok? So let me ask one other Passion-of-Christ inspired question for you to take into this Holy Week. Again, here's what Jesus does. He humbly submits to his passion, to what God is asking of him, he suffers and he's is not broken beyond repair, devastated beyond recognition, ruined and eliminated. Quite the opposite, right, and here we peak at what is coming next Sunday, which is the great victory of the resurrection that is the end result of Christ's passion and what we'll read about on Easter and the Sundays following, in Eastertide which inevitably and irrevocably comes after Passiontide, for what happens is the transformation of all the physical, mental, emotional pain into, as Father Timothy Radcliffe named it, "into a discovery of love and community."

And so here's the second question for you to take into your Holy Week: what have you already suffered in your life that is waiting to be creatively transformed into a discovery of love and community? In other words, is there a particular struggle or pain that you have endured recently or maybe a long time ago that you learned from, grew from, were enlightened by that is needing to be offered as gift to others?

We just learned from Julianne Zimmerman at our Soup and Saints this past Tuesday about Dolores Huerta who took her own sorrows and sufferings as an immigrant in this country who experienced racism and socio-economic injustices and transformed that passion, that suffering done unto her, into a passion, a great desire to work for the rights of workers and immigrants and who even now

at the age of 92 is in Washington advocating for immigrant workers' rights. But it doesn't have to be a massive global thing either, it can be much more local and immediate. Our own Katie Shanahan who joined the church a couple of weeks ago had a blood drive in Wakefield because her and Alec's son Liam had to have blood transfusions in utero and out and he would not have survived without blood donations. So she took that passion, their suffering, and turned it into a passion for helping others get the blood they need.

And so it brings us to another word that arises out of the same word for passion and that is the word that expresses what it looks like to take our passion, our suffering, so that it becomes our passion, our deep desire that brings us alive, and put it at the service of others and that is that it leads us to COMPASSION – a deep desire because of our own suffering to relieve the suffering of another. We had dinner the other night with someone who I think most people who know her experience her as a compassionate person and I learned that she grew up in the difficult circumstance of having a mother who loved her deeply but was also deeply depressed to the point of hospitalization time... and it's obvious that that passion, that suffering, in her life forged her into a person of deep compassion for others.

I could go on and on about people in this room, in this community, in my life and I'm sure you could too who have turned their passion to passion and become through it comPASSIONate. But what about you as you enter into this Holy Week? What passion or suffering in your life is God inviting you to transform into a discovery of love and community?

That's it. Those are two questions for you Holy Week. Two questions that Jesus brings in on his donkey through the gate of your soul: what struggle or pain

do you need to surrender and submit to God and trust that God will transform it and what suffering of your past and your learnings therein are you being invited to offer for the sake of others.

May your passion become your passion and turn into COMpassion in Jesus' name, amen.