

“Let Us Not Pass Over The Passion”

Today is called the *Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday*. In a world where Good Friday is often not a day when people can be in church we put together the beginning and end of Holy Week into one day. Today we started our service with the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Then as the procession of the palms heads into church, we fade to black like in a movie and the words come on the screen that read “several days later.” At that point we are in the house of Simon the Leper and an unnamed woman is anointing Jesus. During the days we skipped were the cleansing of the Temple, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, the Widow’s mite, the prediction of the destruction of the Temple, the lesson of the Fig Tree, and so much more. All of a sudden we are in the midst of the Passion of our Lord.

Many people, me included, have had questions about the use of the word passion in relationship to the betrayal, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. We are used to the word passion being used to describe “a strong feeling or emotion.” As in, “He spoke with *passion*.” Or we think of passion as “an object of someone's love, liking, or desire” as in “Art is my *passion*.” Or we think about it in relationship to intense liking, as in “She has a *passion* for music.”¹ These definitions of passion might describe the crowds that welcome Jesus to Jerusalem. They had a passion for his teaching and miracles.

However, etymologically, passion comes from the Greek word πάσχω (pasio) which means “to suffer, to be acted on.” Thus we get the understanding of Jesus’ Passion as his suffering and being acted on by the religious and political authorities.

As we all know, when passions run high there is often a price to pay. Either those passions lead to some confrontation between the passionate and their opponents, or the passion turns on itself. In this case we see that the passionate crowd that welcomes Jesus into Jerusalem becomes the crowd passionate for his death. We do not know why they turned on him. Perhaps they were disappointed that he did not foment the revolution against Rome or they just soured on him during the week. Perhaps the fear of the Roman authorities or the whispering campaign of the Temple authorities changed their minds. Perhaps it was mob mentality that can so easily swing in the heat of the moment. Whatever it was the passionate enthusiasm of the crowds on Palm Sunday did not sustain through the week.

While we skip from triumph to the cross today, I urge you not to do that this week. Enter Holy Week walking with Jesus and his disciples step by step. Experience the cleansing of the Temple, the parables, the teaching in the Temple, the widow, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and the long days of confusion that culminates in the empty tomb.

I implore you not to be too eager to get to Easter Day. Resurrection cannot come without suffering and death. If we jump past Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to Easter we miss so much. Cheap grace is not grace at all. Jesus did not get to pass over the Passion and neither can we. As painful as it may be for us, think how much more painful it was for Jesus to walk this way of sorrows. Let us gird our loins and tighten our belts as we walk with Jesus toward Golgotha. Resurrection is ahead but it cannot come without the Passion and the passions of this most Holy Week. May God bless you on this journey to the cross and beyond.

¹ Merriam Webster online dictionary