

St Thomas Church  
Passion Sunday  
April 7, 2019  
rmcneely+

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified , dead and buried

Today we turn a corner in Lent.

We remain in Lent in every way

But today and in the remaining 14 days of Lent before  
Easter

We reach the season of Passiontide

The church and the liturgy change today to reflect the new focus of the remaining 14 days of Lent.

The communion service drops the gloria patri from the introit.

We heard the Lenten collect from Ash Wednesday for the last time today.

Probably the most obvious change is the veils.

The Church shrouds its beauty with sadness

As she prepares

To enter anew

Into the mystery of the betrayal,

The denial

And the death of her Lord.

The Church veils the cross, crucifix and icons throughout the church in violet, the color of repentance, humility and penance.

The veils break our visual connection  
with the cross,  
the crucifix,  
forcing us to think about what it may be like  
to be separated from God.

That visual connection will not be restored until Easter.

The sonorous communion bells are replaced by the startling klaker.

Shocking us into the harsh reality of the crucifixion

Ever since Ash Wednesday we have looked inwardly into ourselves

In the examination of our souls  
In the solemn business of discerning our sins  
Seeking absolution of them  
And amending our lives to avoid them

But today the focus and emphasis changes

Rather than our inward focus  
We now look outward  
Heavenward actually

Having spent 28 days in inward reflection

And with our sins firmly in mind  
We consider the terrible price that Jesus paid for those sins.

We consider the Passion of our Lord

“Passion” is one of those words  
that has changed  
in its meaning over the last 400 years.  
The word comes to us from the Latin *passio*  
which literally means *suffering*  
and forms the root of our word “Passion”.  
But the 21<sup>st</sup> Century usage is almost the exact opposite of  
the original meaning. And the word becomes confusing.

Sometimes I think the devil is at work with our language  
to try to confuse  
and obliterate the meanings of words  
so as to prevent us  
from comprehending the word of God  
and the true doctrine of the Church.  
By changing the meaning of the words,  
he runs us astray  
in the same way as if  
the road signs were changed  
we lose our way  
and get lost.

“Passion” as used today  
refers to the admirable quality  
of strong belief  
or association  
with some thing or some one.  
Some people are passionate about art for example  
and have a deep affection for it  
and devote themselves to it

The word as used today is almost the opposite of suffering,  
passion's original meaning.

So the Passiontide points us to the suffering,  
the price Jesus paid for our sins.

And the Church points us toward the last two weeks of our  
Lord's earthly life  
and asks us to walk with Him,  
each step of the way;  
to re-live what happened:  
to experience what He did      to save our souls;  
to pay for our sins.  
to restore us to God:

And the walk begins today, with this Gospel account of the  
final encounter with the Pharisees. The walk will continue  
on Palm Sunday:

Walk with him on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday  
You will hear the Passion According all 4 of the  
Gospel writers, Mathew Mark Luke and John

Walk with Him on Maundy Thursday  
Relive the Last Supper  
and the stripping of the alter  
Walk with Him on Good Friday at noon  
as we place ourselves at the foot of the cross  
and crucifixion

And finally Walk with Him on Easter for the celebration of  
Resurrection

Join Him in remembrance of his journey.

so over the next 14 days we step slowly to Calvary,  
the horror of crucifixion  
and the suffering of the cross.

To resurrection

To redemption

To victory over evil

To victory over death

To the life everlasting

And it all starts today

With the understanding of the terrible price  
we make Jesus pay for our sins.

To understand it, we need to go back

Back to the time of the ancient Hebrews

Back to the time of the Pentateuch, the Torah

Back to the book Leviticus

To see the mystery of the connection between sin and  
sacrifice.

It has always been there.

The ancient books of the Bible

have always pointed us

To the system of the Jewish sacrifices

And we learn the lesson over and over again

That without the shedding of blood,

The very symbol and essence of life

There is no remission of sins.

The same we learn from the prophets of the Old Testament  
The price of our sins is blood.  
An innocent, dove, sheep, calf  
Must die  
To pay for our sins  
The prophets foretold that the Christ would come  
would suffer  
and would die  
would shed His blood  
For His people  
Isaiah told us that the Lord hath laid on Him  
The iniquity of  
Us all.

And so it came to pass.

I can't explain to you why God demanded the suffering  
Why His beloved son  
His innocent and only son  
Was to pay the price for our sins  
I can only tell you that it has happened  
And that by His passion, His suffering, His death  
We are saved  
I can only tell you that in one way or another  
Suffering is the shadow  
And the penalty of sin.

I can only tell you that in some mysterious way  
Jesus was in contact with my sins, our sins  
And endured the agony  
Because of them

Let us not dwell on the pain and agony of crucifixion this morning

    Though that is part of the story  
Let us instead dwell on the love of God  
    Love so incomprehensible  
    That Jesus, with the power to prevent His death  
    The power to avoid the suffering  
Virtually convicted Himself in His trial, when the witnesses could not

    And knowing all that was to come  
    Jesus chose to be the sacrifice  
    The Pascal lamb  
    To save us from our sins  
Can we ever comprehend the love  
    That would do that?  
    That did that?

The essence of Holy Communion is  
    The celebration of the Passion of Christ  
    The sacrificial death of Jesus, the Christ.  
    In every communion we offer ourselves  
    In union  
    With that eternal sacrifice.

The Communion is the eternal  
    Transfixed in time.

In every Communion  
    We enter into union with the Passion of Christ  
    Caught in that eternal moment.

The Passion of Christ defines the meaning of the love of God.

Passion is the union of the words suffering and love.

And so the story for the next 14 days is passion, suffering, obedience and love

It all leads to Easter,  
    To resurrection  
    To redemption  
    To salvation  
    To eternal life

Shall we go for a walk together, with Him?

It all starts today.

The trailhead is right here.

Shall we?