

Pastor Shaun Arndt
March 3, 2021
Midweek Lent Sermon

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood... to Jesus be the glory... forever and ever!
Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus I will ponder now, on your holy passion. The Passion History Reading. What is this *Passion* we speak of during Lent?

Passion comes to our language from Latin: *Passionis*, which means suffering. The passion refers to the intense suffering the Son of God, our Savior endured in those final hours of his life.

The uttermost agony of the cross was further ahead, but Jesus already faces suffering now as he leads His disciples out of Jerusalem, through the darkness, toward the Mount of Olives.

In love, He once again warns His disciples what is about to happen. He does not guess it. He knows it from the Holy Word of God given through the prophet Zechariah. He the Good Shepherd will be struck and the **sheep will be scattered.**

Even as His own suffering arrives, Jesus, always thinking of others points them ahead to the Easter victory and a blessed, joyous reunion in **Galilee.**

And how do His followers respond to His great love and concern for them? They only add to Jesus' suffering! They refuse to listen. They spurn his teaching from the Word of God. They spurn Him, who is the Word of God made flesh.

If you've been there, you know it is not fun. To give true, loving, caring advice because you love someone and you know it is true and want only what's best for them, but then they hurl it back at you to their own harm. If you've been there, you know it's heartbreaking.

And so it had to be for Jesus, as Peter says, "No, no, Jesus, you're mistaken, I don't need your warning, I don't need your advice, even if these other guys fall away, I won't!"

In perfect friendship, Jesus tells Peter how he will deny knowing Jesus three times that very night. Maybe now, Peter will listen and stop trusting in himself and how good of a disciple he can be and realize what we all need to realize, that he desperately needs Jesus.

Peter's response? More pain for our Lord. To Jesus' face Peter denies that Christ knows what He's talking about, denies that He is the Lord and Master who knows all things, denies that Jesus implies Peter is a weak and frail sinner like everyone else. And then to a man, all the others join right in and **say the same thing.**

And it only gets worse from there. The weight the world's sin and guilt of all time, all people, past, present and future begins to weigh down on Jesus' holy, innocent, sinless soul.

In **overwhelming sorrow** to the point of death, He turns to the Father in prayer, but also seeks the prayers and support of his three closest earthly friends. He keeps Peter, James and John close and asks them, "**Stay here and keep watch.**"

But they only bring more grief. They shouted they would die for Him, but they won't stay away to support him for even **one hour**. Not once. Not twice. But three times they leave him in the lurch and slumber away.

And yet He does not bite their heads off or speak scathing sarcasm, but rather the law they need to hear, that they are not as strong as self-reliant as they thought—No!—they are far from it! He does not lambast them for the pain they have caused, but puts the best construction on it all as the Word teaches: **The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**

In the meanwhile, He has received the Father's answer to His perfect prayer. Yes, a perfect prayer, even when He asks for another way than suffering the punishment for every sinner. You see, if Jesus was eager to just throw his life away will nil, how could he have kept the 5th commandment that honors God's gift of life?

But even as He asks for another way, He is fully committed and ready to cheerfully accept a 'no answer' from His Father and to walk straight into suffering imagine... **not what I will, but what you will.**

What can we ponder now from His holy Passion?

Like every other moment of Jesus' life, these hours of suffering were filled with perfect love for God and his fellow man. We see it in his perfect prayer we spoke about. We see it in His patiently teaching his disciples despite their determination *not to listen to Him* this night!

Thank God for His sinless perfection, because we desperately need it! Our sins were there that night too. We are the opposite of perfect and stand condemned for every way we have been just like the disciples.

We have not always wanted to hear Jesus' loving warning or haven't been eager to listen to this or that teaching of the Bible, which is of course not listening to Jesus. We too have not watched and prayed the way we ought. We have been far less patient with people in our lives in the face of far less frustration. We constantly struggle with our sinful hearts that naturally are bent in on ourselves and what we want, instead of praying and living the words: **not what I will, but what you will.**

So thank God for Jesus' perfect love, His patient endurance, His obedient prayers. For you see, God places this sinless life of Jesus over us to cover us to cover our sins and faults and set us free from eternal judgment.

What amazing and undeserved love we see in Jesus! If we had such frustrating and flawed disciples, would we have not said long ago, they're just not worth it, the way they fail to listen and live as I teach, forget it, I'm not suffering for them?

But in that amazing, saving, undeserved love, with you, yes you, in His mind and heart, Jesus doesn't turn his back on those disciples or on us. He doesn't flee into the darkness to leave us to hell's punishment. He doesn't use His power to escape, but steadfastly marches from suffering to suffering as He goes to meet his betrayer, to be arrested and endure all that comes next.

And why? To save you. To forgive me. To give us a heavenly home we could never deserve or afford.

So that even when He has called us to suffer as we follow Him in a broken world, we know He who loves us has a purpose and a plan to do what is best for us in the end and that He who saved you will help and strengthen you and see you safely home to heaven.

And all the while Jesus knows what you're going through, not just because He is eternal, all knowing God, but because He suffered to save you, He has been there, and so He will be there for you. Amen.

Praise the Lord, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. Amen.