

## **Passion Sunday Narrative and Homily**

Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

Sunday, March 28, 2010  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Based on Luke 22:14-23:47

**A Reading from Luke: *When the hour came, Jesus took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this. (Luke 22:14-23)***

Only one person in this cast of characters is innocent. That would be our Lord Jesus. Without any guile, his words and deeds are good and right and faithful. Yet though he knows he is innocent, he does not resort to defending himself. Even when he knows he will suffer unjustly. Even when he knows one of his friends will betray him. Instead of "fight or flight," Jesus gives. Instead of "I'll get them before they can get me," he offers himself with bread and cup. And his closest friends cannot fathom that one of them—any of them—has the capacity to betray. They believe they are completely innocent.

***Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed. "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (Luke 22:39-42, 47-48)***

What's that saying? Laugh and the world laughs with you. Weep, and you weep alone. If Jesus was beginning to feel lonely, this was the moment. Heads nodding, the disciples could not see anything beyond a refreshing 40 winks after that big Passover Meal. So on the Mount of Olives, in anguish, Jesus prayed to God the Father, all alone. He prayed he wouldn't have to go through this. He prayed God might consider altering the plan. Ultimately, he prayed that whatever was to happen would be in keeping with his Father's holy will. And when the time came that he was no longer alone on that Mount—when the guards and the crowd and Judas arrived—well, what's that other saying? A person can still be alone in a crowd. You know, it was the height of irony: Judas betraying Jesus...with a kiss. The very gesture that connotes true friendship and love is used to point out the accused. A kiss is the act that identifies one solitary man out of the lineup; and no Miranda rights are read before they cart the innocent one away.

***Then they seized Jesus and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down***

***together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:54-62)***

Peter was the natural born leader of the disciples—well, second only to their teacher, Jesus. It was obvious he was destined for great things. Cheerleaders would have yelled, "Peter, Peter, he's our man. If he can't do it, nobody can!" Peter was always the first to speak up, answer provocative questions, offer what he thought was sage advice, promise undying loyalty. But when push came to shove, when being Jesus' follower became a liability and not an advantage, Peter tried to melt back into the crowd, go unnoticed, slip into anonymity. If Peter had had his way, he would have been seen simply as an innocent bystander.

***When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought Jesus to their council. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!" Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place." Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him." Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they had asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished. (Luke 22:66-71, 23:1-5, 13-25)***

While Pilate found in Jesus no grounds for a death sentence, I suppose Jesus wasn't exactly innocent. Look, Jesus was accused of perverting the people. If transforming people, if changing their hearts, if bringing them to repentance and faithfulness was "perverting" them, then yes, Jesus was guilty. But that was only "perversion" if you thought the Roman Empire and its *Pax Romana* had it right in the first place. Jesus healed, forgave, taught, welcomed, had compassion upon, and loved people. They experienced a peace and a newness of life because of him. *Pax Romana*? There was no peaceable life in

the empire—just taxes and oppression and hedonism. But Jesus offered a glimpse of *shalom*, of peace in the kingdom of God. And that must have profoundly threatened those who strove to maintain their domination and power. People resisted what Jesus offered. Oh, he was guilty all right—guilty of nearly turning the Roman Empire on its imperialistic head.

***Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." (Luke 23:32-33, 39-47)***

The criminal hanging on his cross could not help Jesus. The centurion on his watch stood by and did nothing. Yet both, even in their own guilt, recognized Jesus' innocence. Recognized the truth in Jesus. You and I, in our own suffering and sinfulness, cannot change the events of that day. But would we want to? This was God's holy will for reconciling the world—and you and me—to God's self. No, we cannot change that day's course of events. We can only bow in humility and gratitude. **AMEN.**