

Passion Story

April 5, 2009

(Palm Sunday - Year B)

Mark 14:32 - 15:39

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

We have just heard the story of the death of Jesus Christ. And in this last week, one of the things that has struck me - is the *title* that we have given for the reading of this Gospel account.

Usually on Sundays, I introduce the Gospel reading by saying: "The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark." But today, I introduced this story by saying: "The *Passion* of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark."

The story that we just heard read in dramatic fashion is not only a Gospel story.

The story that we just heard read is also a story about the passion, about the death, of a particular person.

It is a story about the death of Jesus.

Yet, not only that - the passion story is a story about us.

In this last week, it seems that I have been surrounded by passion stories, about stories of death and loss.

Last Wednesday, my first cousin, Steve Sterquell, was killed in a one car auto accident.

Steve was 56 years old and a successful business man in Amarillo with a wonderful family.

On Wednesday morning, Steve's car was going down Interstate 27, just a few miles from his house.

Then his car veered just slightly to the right - and he crashed into a concrete pillar.

The car burst into flames - killing him instantly.

I found out about the death of my cousin when my mother phoned me here at the church.

In tears, she told me that my cousin, her nephew, had just been killed.

And then, the passion story began.

Phone calls and emails were quickly exchanged among family members.

Questions were asked:

How did the accident happen?

How is Aunt Betty, Steve's mother, handling the news?

Is there anything I can do to help?

Then, the telling of stories began:

Stories of remembrance - recalling the last time we had seen or spoken to Steve.

Stories of humor - laughing about funny times when we were kids.

Stories of regret - wishing that we had kept in touch more often.

And, before I knew it, I realized that I was in the midst of a passion story, the title of which could be:

The Passion of Steve Sterquell according to Jeff.

Then, after the death of my cousin last Wednesday, Champe Fitzhugh, a beloved member of this church, died on Friday morning.

And I found myself in the midst of yet another passion story.

And as I have lived into these personal passion stories,

I am so thankful that I am not alone in my experience -

Because my God has a passion story, too.

My God's passion story is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus has just shared a Passover meal with his friends.

He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Then, the passion story begins.

After Jesus' followers flee away,

Phone calls and emails are exchanged.

Questions are asked:

Have they taken Jesus to Pilate?

How is Mary, the mother of Jesus, handling the news?

Is there anything I can do to help?

Then, the telling of stories begins:

Stories of remembrance - recalling the parade of palm branches that greeted Jesus when they had entered Jerusalem.

Stories of humor - laughing at the larger-than-life fishing stories that Jesus used to tell.

Stories of regret - wishing that they had not denied and betrayed and run away from their friend.

And before the followers of Jesus know it, they are in the midst of their own passion story:

The Passion of their Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder:

What if Jesus had never died on the cross?

What if we took our Bibles - and we ripped the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ out?

What if we ripped out the 104 verses in Matthew, the 87 verses in Mark, the 88 verses in Luke, the 77 verses in John that all describe the death of Jesus?

What if there was no passion story for our God?

If we ripped those many pages out of our Bibles, then Christianity would really be no different from any other religion.

If we ripped the passion and death of Jesus out of our Bibles, then we would have stories about a really nice Jewish man who teaches us to love God and to love our neighbor.

If there was no cross or passion, we would be left with a God who does not truly know what it is like to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

However, God *does* have a passion story.

Our God knows what it is like to be betrayed and denied and spit upon and killed.

Our God knows what it is like when the phone rings at 3 o'clock in the morning with dreaded news from the DPS on the other end.

Our God knows what it is like to hear the words:

“I am sorry - but we did everything we could.”

Our God knows what it is like to cry out:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Each of us here has our own passion stories.
And my God - your God - has a passion story, too.

AMEN.

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