

The Sunday of the Passion
St. Luke 22:1–23:56

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

For you, Jesus rode into Jerusalem atop a donkey to shouts of Hosanna.

For you, Jesus was betrayed by one of His own disciples, one of His Twelves, a hand-picked follower.

For you, He sat at the table with His Twelve and made the Passover a meal of His own body and blood for the remembrance of His death that is your life.

For you, Jesus was captured, bound, and struck, enduring the scattering of His sheep.

For you, Jesus was tried and rejected by the religious leaders, and tried and found innocent by the governor, yet convicted anyway by a system that didn't know true justice, even though He was standing right there before him, swapping places with an actual criminal.

For you, Jesus bore His cross through Jerusalem and to a hill outside of town, exhorting the women not to weep for Him but for Himself.

For you, Jesus endured His Passion because He would not see the sinner die. For you... Those words ought to sink in, because everything He did and suffered for you, He did so because you deserve it but He wouldn't see you die for it, and that because you could not bring yourself back from death. If you die in your trespasses and sins, that's it—game over—the end! You are the sinner He would not see die! This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, rode into Jerusalem, was betrayed, celebrated the Last Supper, was captured, bound, and beaten, was tried and convicted, was led to Golgotha, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your sin. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life and you were declared righteous as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed from this Vale of Tears. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God; you are forgiven for all of your sins.

Now, if you die with your sins covered in the blood of the Lamb, death is not the end. It isn't game over. For you will rise in a resurrection like His to everlasting life. That's salvation.

God is passionate to save. Salvation is His passion: forgiving sinners; raising the dead. He doesn't desire the destruction of anyone or anything He has created, but His passion is that everyone come to repentance, the re-cognition that in the death of Jesus there is forgiveness, life, and salvation for all without exception. That includes each of you here today. Take Passion Sunday personally, the passion of Jesus to save you. He had you in mind, and did it all for you.

Throughout the Wednesday Divine Services in Lent, you've heard of one stop or another along the way in Jesus' Passion. Today, you heard the entire thing...two long chapters in St. Luke's Gospel. It finally ends with Jesus' death and burial. At the heart of it all is forgiveness. How beautifully did St. Luke encapsulate that with one of Christ's seven last words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Ignorance of the law is no excuse, right? Nor is it here. All those who conspired, convicted, and executed the punishment against Jesus are guilty of His blood. They have all worked together to take an innocent Man's life, even though He died with the sins of the world in His own flesh. Even in the agony of His Passion, though, Jesus pleads for their forgiveness, for they didn't know what they were doing.

They were instruments of God's wrath against the sins of the world. While they may have reveled in the death of someone they perceived to be a troublemaker, a threat to their status quo, a threat to their power and prestige, they had no idea that they were performing the will of God...for you! Even Caiaphas the high priest, who prophesied that it would be better that one die for the people, spoke more than even he intended or knew. (cf. John 11:49-53)

Doesn't that speak volumes of you, as well?

On the one hand, you have the Psalmist who wrote, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults." (Psalm 19:12) You may have some idea of the things that you are doing. You may even know some of the things that you have done to be sinful. And you even know, having been catechized, that even the good you do—that which may be called good, as in service to your neighbor—is done by you in a sinful flesh. But you are never fully aware of every bit of iniquity, wickedness, fault, and sin which you commit. So, the Psalm wrote of you, and you can pray that which he wrote.

The Lutheran Confessions speak to this point as well, not only in citing Psalm 19:12 against the papists who demand a full accounting of sins committed when one goes to Confession, but also that original sin is a "deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, mysterious, and unspeakable corruption of the entire nature and all its powers." (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article 1.11) It is so fathomless and mysterious that you could say that you are blissfully and blessedly unaware of the full gravity of your sinfulness and even the sins you commit; blissfully and blessedly because if you could see the depth of your corruption, you would drop dead on the spot from sheer terror, so God in His infinite grace and mercy hides it from you. You do not know what you do.

"Declare me innocent from hidden faults," indeed.

Still, forgiveness is at the heart of Jesus' Passion, so much so that He prayed to the Father for His torturers' forgiveness...and for yours. He went to the cross in order to shed His blood as a propitiation for your sins—known and unknown, because without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (cf. Hebrews 9:22)—so that you would be covered in His righteousness and declared innocent where He had been declared guilty.

Jesus' Passion was to make a great exchange for you, because He does not want to see the sinner die. He took your sin and sinfulness from you—from the known to the deepest, most wicked and horrible, most fathomless and mysterious, the most unspeakable—He took it all to the cross and died for it...for you and for all. There is nothing left in you, though you still struggle with your sinful nature to this day, so long as you live on this side of eternity; every bit of it, past, present, and future, died with Jesus on the cross. And it was for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

To the repentant thief He said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Such a thing is said to all those to whom He has exchanged His righteousness for their guilt and shame. This exchange grants entrance into Paradise. Dear Baptized, you receive a foretaste of that here, today. Right here, in this moment, in this place, you have Paradise, though you do not yet get to live the fullness of it.

"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" With that, He breathed His last. The work of salvation is finished. Jesus has accomplished the salvation of mankind. He has died for the sins of the world...for you. Passion and shedding of blood is followed by burial. The lifeless body once filled with sin is placed into a previously unused grave, and there Jesus rested on the seventh day, having completed all of His work of salvation. He would rise again in three days.

But, the victory is won. Your victory is won. In Christ crucified, you have life and salvation and the forgiveness for all of your sins—and I mean ALL of them.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.