

For the past couple of years we have used the sermon time on Palm Sunday to point us towards an important part of our lives as followers of Christ: telling the story of Jesus' final days, called The Passion. Each Gospel has a slightly different emphasis. Each passion has things unique to it. This year we retell the story through Luke's eyes.

Luke is a masterful weaver of memorable story. Luke is the only evangelist -- for example--to tell the story of the stable where Jesus was born, to tell us there was no room at the inn, there were shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night, and Luke gives us the Angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest."

Luke likes to set the scene. His Passion is no exception.

- Luke's Gospel Passion draws a compassionate Christ. Notice that in this gospel, when soldiers come to arrest Jesus, the slave's ear is cut off—same as in all the other Gospels-- but only in this one does Jesus heal him afterward. Luke's Jesus heals even his enemies.

We need a "fact checker" at Jesus' trial—because no one is paying attention to the facts. The Jewish officials are twisting what Jesus said and did to fit their aims.

**Accusers:** Jesus is perverting our nation.

**Fact check:** Partially true-- if you're a Pharisee. Jesus preaches fidelity to God and neighbor. He doesn't always respect Pharisaic authority. He breaks Levitical law by calling all people clean, eating with the outcast, and loving socially unacceptable people.

**Accuser:** He is forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar.

**Fact check:** False: He says render to Caesar what is Caesar's and what to God what is God's. Money is a system of the world. But our entire being is God's.

**Accuser:** He stirs up the people.

**Fact check:** Partial truth: He teaches the people. He teaches them about:

**The parable of the Good Samaritan.** *ALL people are your neighbors.*

**The parable of the Prodigal Son:** *No matter what we do, God rejoices in us and will welcome us back. Even when people-- who think they are "better" people-- think God shouldn't.*

**The Parable of the fig tree,** *which is always given another year.*

- It's hard to justify one's hatred with Jesus preaching overwhelming love. I guess that could stir up the people.

In Luke, Jesus predicts Peter's denial, but only in Luke do we have Jesus turn and look at Peter after the cock crows. I can only imagine the look of compassionate love on Jesus' face as he turned and looked at Peter—and how that broke Peter's heart.

In this passion narrative Peter will be sifted. That's the word used in the text: sifted. How many bakers do we have here? Then you know that sifting flour accomplishes two things—it sifts out husks and chaff and pebbles—and it introduces air into the flour so whatever you're baking rises to a greater height and is lighter in texture.

Satan—in Hebrew Satan means “tempter”—Satan will sift Peter. Sifting will get rid of the things that don't belong, and it will introduce air—spirit—life into Peter.

But then notice: in Luke—Jesus knows that Peter will fail him and be sifted—yet he still believes in him—and knows he'll pull through it. He asks Peter to encourage the disciples after this happens.

Luke has given us many quotes that we're all familiar with in terms of the Passion narratives—but that *only appear* in Luke's account:

- “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”

And from the criminal:

- “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus understood that the two others crucified beside him were guilty of crimes. The criminal says it himself—“We are getting what we *deserve* for our deeds.” So-- Jesus should be happy that they are getting what they deserve, right?

But really give this some thought-- if we all got what we *deserve*, would that really make us happy? Jesus responds to those who get what they deserve with love: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” That statement is only in Luke.

“Into your hands I commend my spirit.” In Luke, Jesus doesn't cry out in agony—we empties himself for God.

We could almost call this a reading from the comPassion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Let's listen again to the Story, as told by Luke.