

For the past couple of years we have used the sermon on Palm Sunday to point us all towards the passion of Jesus which will shortly be read. This year we are hearing Luke's version of the passion.

Luke is a master storyteller. Luke is the only Gospel to relate the story of the stable where Jesus was born, no room at the inn, shepherds in their field keeping watch over their flocks by night—angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest.” ‘

Luke is a poet who likes to set the scene.

- Luke's Gospel draws a compassionate Christ. Notice that in this gospel, when the slave's ear is cut off—Jesus heals him. Only in Luke does he heal everyone-- even someone from the party that has come to arrest and kill him.
- We need a “fact checker” at the trial—because no one is paying attention to the facts. They are twisting what Jesus said and did to fit their aims. When there's a large crowd—a mob—fear takes over, rational thinking is jettisoned and anything can—and does – happen.

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

**Fact check:** He is telling everyone that their fidelity is to God and neighbor. He doesn't cave to religious authority. He breaks Levitical law by calling all people clean, eating with the outcast, loving socially unacceptable people.

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

**Fact check:** 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:** They *fear* that Jesus will stir up the people with his message of inclusive, radical love. Like:

**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 he shouldn’t.*

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

Jesus predicts Peter’s denial in each of the gospels, but only in Luke do we have Jesus turn and look at Peter after the cock crows.

In this passion narrative Jesus says 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 your baked confection rises to a greater height and is lighter in texture.

Satan—in Hebrew Satan means tempter—will sift Peter. Sifting will get rid of the things that don’t belong, and it will introduce air—oxygen— God’s spirit--life into Peter. Jesus believes in Peter even knowing all these things.

Luke has given us many quotes that we're all familiar with—but only appear in Luke's account:

- “Father forgive them, they know not what they do.”
- “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
- “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

This story is pure Luke: Jesus knows what crimes the criminal has committed—after all Crucifixion was saved for murders, and WORSE-- enemies of the State. Opposing the Roman state was something the Romans would not tolerate. Enemies had to be shown how powerful their oppressors were. The Jewish authorities took their cue from that. Deterrence was important.

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

No. Think about it-- if we all got what we *deserve*, we'd all be in trouble. Jesus responds with love.

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

- Critics have observed that Luke's version of the crucifixion bears none of the atoning value that it had for Paul. What Luke's Passion does, is describe God's forgiveness and healing presence through and by Jesus. Every act of Jesus is done out of Love. Luke's Jesus asks us to choose Love. Because Love has first chosen us.

Let us listen again to the Story, as told by the author of Luke.