

This year we are reading the Passion narrative from the Gospel of Matthew. Now, legend has it that Matthew was a tax collector. I would assume that – being a tax collector, he dealt heavily with numbers.

After studying the passion narrative from Matthew's gospel – I would say that is evident.

Matthew has a fixation—especially in this recounting of the Passion-- about the number three.

In ancient Hebrew tradition, 3 signifies completeness and stability.

- Number 3 is the number of good fortune.
- The ancient Greeks taught that the number three was the first true number. And to the Greeks
- Three was considered the number of harmony, wisdom and understanding.
- Three is a sacred number in many religions.
- In rituals, many actions are preformed three times.

Even in our culture we have a saying--

- Third time's the charm.
- Three is a signifier of time: Past Present Future, Birth Life Death, Beginning Middle End
- Three is the number of the divine, the Trinity.

I ask you to notice how many times 3 is used in the Passion today:

- Jesus told Peter-- you will deny me 3 times
- Jesus took 3 people to pray with him privately in the garden at Gethsemane: Peter, James and John

- The accusation against Jesus that led to his arrest was Jesus saying: “I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in 3 days
- Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver—10 X 3
- 3 people were crucified: Jesus and two bandits
- People told Jesus to “Save himself” --after he was crucified-- 3 times
- There were 3 Mary’s at the cross, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the other Mary...
- The soldiers were told to secure the tomb for 3 days
- And later this week: Jesus will rise on the 3rd day.

That’s a lot of 3’s – trinities—in this passage. I don’t think it’s coincidental. I think Matthew understood the power of 3.

Perhaps he was remembering the 3’s in our lives:

- mind, body, and soul;
- faith, hope and love
- Father, Son, Spirit

These trinities keep us from the sin of Dualism: this or that, one or the other. Black or White. Either/ Or.

Trinities, 3’s assure us that the world is multi-faceted, our souls are multi-faceted, our lives are multi-faceted. There is power in 3.

As we read the Passion Narrative today, listen for the power of 3. And then begin to notice where God’s Trinities appear in your life. Let all the 3’s you discover in this story—and in yours--remind you that life—like God—is never just one thing or the other. It is a Trinity of possibilities.

Let us listen to the Passion: