

The Passion of Our Lord – I

William Cwirla

Matthew 26:1–35

THE PASSION OF OUR LORD ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

“PASSEOVER”

The Passover is at hand; the time for Jesus’ crucifixion has come. The chief priests and elders plot to arrest and kill Him. “But not during the feast, lest there be a riot among the people.” Can’t be having a riot on a religious holiday, now can we? There would be dire repercussions. Even religious treachery has its contingencies.

An unnamed woman anoints Jesus’ head at the house of Simon the leper. A woman and a leper. A table of outcasts, those on the margins of acceptability. The disciples note the indignity of her offering. What a waste! The perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. How many poor have you fed, Peter? James? John? Judas? You’re the treasurer. Tell us. This woman has embraced my death and anointed me for it. Do you? What she has done will be remembered and proclaimed in the whole world, even if they fail to mention her name.

Remember her the next time you say, “The money could have been given to the poor” as you justify your greed while judging the devotion of another.

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, hand-picked by Jesus (you’d think He would have vetted his resume before hiring him!) conspires with the authorities to hand Jesus over for thirty silver pieces, the prophetic price of a slave. Consider the contrast. The woman gave all she had; Judas got all he could bargain for.

Remember Judas when you exchange Jesus for a better deal, your thirty pieces of whatever brings you pleasure.

Passover day arrives. The disciples prepare the meal in a borrowed room. The One who had no place to lay His head, who rode into the city on borrowed donkey, now presides at a

borrowed table. In the evening, Jesus gathers with His Twelve. Not His family, as was the custom. But His Twelve. These are His family.

There is sorrow in the air. One will betray me. “Is it I, Lord?” they all ask. No man can trust himself. It could be you. Or me. “Is it I, Rabbi?” Judas asks, with thirty silver pieces in his pocket. He cannot call Jesus “Lord” only “Rabbi.” So it is with all flatterers of Jesus who betray Him in secret. Judas’ own words betray him. “You have said so.”

Jesus takes the Passover bread and breaks it into pieces. He gives each disciple a morsel. “Take, eat. This is my body.” The body crucified and buried, given into death. He gives them a share in His death with this bread. Then He takes His cup, the one after supper, and gives it to each of them to drink from it. “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” They are blood brothers now with Him and with each other. At the first passover, the blood was painted on the doorposts. In this passover, the blood is given as wine to gladden their saddened hearts. His covenant blood, the new covenant of forgiveness. “I will forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more.” His blood is His life given as an atoning sacrifice (Lev 17:11), poured out for them and the countless many, for their forgiveness, and for yours. His life for yours.

You drink of that same cup two thousand years later. “Do this for my remembrance.” You remember Him by eating His body and drinking His blood. His death and His life are your food and drink. They are His “medicine of immortality,” not an antidote to disease but the antidote to eternal death. “I will raise you up on the last day.” He will not, He cannot, forsake His own Body and Blood. In the Supper we remember Him in His death so that He will remember us in ours. “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

They sang a hymn, likely Psalms 115-118, the “Hallel psalms” “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.” They trek to the Mount of Olives, a place for prayer. “You will all fall away because of me this night.” Even His Body and Blood won’t prevent their falling away. It must be so. The good Shepherd stricken, the sheep will scatter. But He will seek and find them again, after He is raised from the dead, and gather them in Galilee.

Peter, who denied Jesus’ cross and mission, denies his own as well. “Everyone else may fall away, but I will never fall away.” Oh yes, you will, Peter. More than all the others. You will fall spectacularly, three times over before the rooster crows twice, denying me before a harmless

little servant girl standing around a fire. Still Peter denies it. “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.” He will deny Jesus, three times. And he would die with Jesus. As we all must die with Jesus.

Remember Peter when you think you are strong strong and feel that nothing can topple you. Take heed, lest you fall. Remember Peter when you think you are courageous, and bold. Remember how easy it is to deny your Lord in the face of persecution. And remember how gracious your Lord is to forgive you.

Jesus’ anointing, His betrayal of a friend, the treachery of the religious, the denial of the disciple, the Body and the Blood – all this for you, and for your forgiveness, life, and salvation.

This is the Passion of our Lord.

SOURCE

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Hacienda Heights, CA (htlcms.org), “The Passion of Our Lord – I”, posted 2020-03-05 (<https://htlcms.org/2020/03/the-passion-of-our-lord-i/>).