

Sermon
 April 14, 2019
 Palm Sunday
 The Rev. Gary R Brower

Isaiah 50.4-91
 Psalm 31.9-16
 Philippians 2.5-11
 Luke 22-14 - 23.56

“The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.” Words we heard some time ago in the course of this service; words we hear every year on Palm Sunday and Good Friday. “The Passion of our Lord.” “Passion.” A word we hear often enough outside of the context of Palm Sunday and, in that non-church-related context, “passion” conjures up many images that might lead us back to church, perhaps to the confessional. This morning, then, I would like to muse for a while on the word “passion.”

“Passion” comes to us from Middle English and Old English, derived from ecclesiastical Latin “*passion*,” referring to Christ’s sufferings on the cross. But its etymology is much richer than simply that. The connection with Christ’s sufferings is found in Acts 1:3, where the author picks up the story begun in the Gospel of Luke: “After his suffering, [Jesus] presented himself alive...” “After his suffering” — “*meta to pathein auten*.” “*Pathein*” — the infinitive form of the verb “*pascho*.” “*Pascho*” — “to have an experience, to suffer (death), endure, undergo . . . generally refers to evil.”

“Passion.” “*Pascho*” — related to “*Pascha*”, the Greek word used for the Feast of the Passover, the Passover meal itself. The Paschal Lamb. It is the word now in the Greek tradition that refers to Easter itself. Passion, Pascha. Suffering, Passover. Easter. Joined in this word. Joined in this season. Joined in this man, Jesus.

But “*pascho*” and its infinitive form “*pathein*” have other meanings as well. “*Pathein*” becomes “*pathos*” — in Greek, “anything that befalls one; an incident, accident, what one has suffered”. In English, “*pathos*” is that quality of literature evoking pity or compassion. *Pathos* — Jesus on the cross. Suffering at the hands of others. What do we feel? From Lamentations, “Behold, and see, if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow!” (1:12).

Passion. Pathos. From which we have the prefix “*patho-*,” as in pathology— “the science or study of the nature/origin of disease,” or “a deviation from a healthy/normal condition.” Pathos. Suffering. Jesus’s suffering. “A deviation from a healthy, normal condition?” Who was the deviant responsible for Jesus on the cross? Who was, who is, healthy, normal? “Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended?” (Hymn 158) Who

was, who is, pathological? Passion, suffering. "Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee... I it was denied thee: I crucified thee" (Hymn 158).

Passion. *Pathos*. From which we derive the suffix "*-pathy*," as in empathy or sympathy — "the identification with, or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, attitudes of another". That harmony of, or agreement in, feelings. Passion. Jesus whipped, mocked, hanging on a cross. Identifying with us... "who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven" (Nicene Creed).

Passion. *Pathos*. "*-pathy*" — as in "apathy", an absence of emotion, a lack of interest or care. No passion. No suffering. No Jesus on the cross if God didn't care. No redemption. No hope. "A-pathy" — not God's way. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son..." (John 3:16). Passion.

Passion. In today's world, commonly associated with best-selling novels and daytime dramas. Lust as a substitute for love. It is any strong affection or desire. Passion, lust. It is fervor, zeal, ardor. It is ire, fury, wrath. It is compelling, overpowering. It apparently drives us mad: "a crime of passion." From the Song of Songs, "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm: for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned" (8:6-7). Passion. Jesus suffering. Love for humanity — a flash of fire, a raging flood. Scorned?

Passion. In ages past, the stories of martyrs' deaths were titled "Passions." Individuals — singly or in groups — who suffered for their faith. Who were put to death in shameful or horrible ways because of their love of the Lord. Passion begetting passion. Sympathy leading to pathology? "Who are these like stars appearing, these, before God's throne who stand? . . . These are they who have contended for their Savior's honor long..." (Hymn 286). "I sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew... They loved the Lord so dear, so dear, and his love made them strong..." (Hymn 293). Passion. Martyrs. Sympathy? "And I mean to be one, too?"

Passion. Pascha. Passover. Paschal Lamb. "At the Lamb's high feast . . . Christ the victim. Christ the priest" (Hymn 174).

Passion. *Pathos*. Pathology? Apathy? Sympathy.

Passion. Love. Lust.

Passion. Whipping. Mocking. Crucified. "The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now" (Hymn 483).

Passion. Martyrs. "Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might; thou Lord their captain in the well-fought fight; thou in the darkness drear, their one true light" (Hymn 287).

Passion.

"See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown.
Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all" (Hymn 474).

Passion.

Amen.