

Introduction to the Passion Narrative  
Pastor Amy Walter-Peterson  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Fairport, NY  
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Each year during Holy Week, along with disciples of Jesus around the world, we focus our collective attention on the narrative of his final week. Today, in worship, we hear this story – recalling his entry into Jerusalem in a parade of glory, his final meal, the betrayal of one of his dearest friends, his trial, and his death by crucifixion. This narrative is central to our faith. This story shows us that there is nowhere God, in Christ, is not present. God will go to the depths of suffering and hell to show that God so loves the world.

This pivotal story is also filled with all too human reminders of the ways that we fall short of God's all-encompassing love. John's gospel is especially challenging because of the ways that it refers to "the Jews" or "Judeans", or "Jewish leaders" as those responsible for Jesus' death. The history of the world is filled with too many examples of ways that Christians have perverted this very story to call for violence against Jewish people of their own day.

Lutheran Christians bear the legacy of Martin Luther and his anti-Judaic writings. We cannot forget this painful legacy and we bear an important responsibility to condemn speech that can lead to hate and violence against Jewish people, even when it's part of our sacred text. As we read this narrative today, we remember that we see ourselves in the voices of those who opposed and condemned Jesus, including the group of religious and community leaders often identified as "Jews" in John's gospel.

In today's extended narrative of Christ's Passion, the congregation will voice many roles – the beloved disciple, the crowd that gathers and witnesses these events, bystanders within the crowd, a soldier. In John's gospel the actions against Jesus appear to be driven by a smaller group of religious and community leaders. Whenever leaders speak in the narrative we read today, these words will be voiced by our Chancel Choir, who, like leaders in this story, are among the crowd, but set apart from them. When they speak, they presume to speak for all who witnessed these events.

In every time and place, when the demands of leaders are met with silence by those they presume to speak for, the silence of the crowds marks their consent and tacit agreement.

Throughout Lent, we have heard from the perspective of Peter. Today, as we listen to this narrative, we remember that we participate in it – as bystanders, as disciples, as religious leaders, as people complicit. As this narrative unfolds, we invite you to listen deeply with a spirit of openness and reflection. The story of Christ's passion and resurrection that we return to each Holy Week is the most tangible expression of God's wondrous love that our faith provides.