

## “The Cost of Following Jesus: Christ’s Passion”

Scripture: Luke 19:29-40; 22:7-8, 14-23; Luke 23:26, 32-49

Rev. Mary Bowman

April 13, 2025



First Presbyterian  
Church of Charlotte

This morning we are celebrating Palm Sunday.

And we are also celebrating Passion Sunday.

The events of Palm Sunday begin Passion Week — what most of us call Holy Week.

Christ’s Passion includes everything that happens between Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, right up until Jesus’ resurrection.

Now, most of us associate the word passion with something good.

Passion in a romance is good.

Feeling passionate about a cause is good.

Being passionate about your vocation is good.

Passion can be an intense feeling, a powerful conviction, an ardent love, or a desire for something.

In each these situations, passion is defined as an emotion.

It is interesting that on a certain level, Holy Week is about emotion.

But Holy Week is not called Passion Week because of the emotions we see.

Holy Week is called Passion Week because of the other meaning of the word passion.

You see, passion also means “to suffer and to endure.”

And Holy Week, in many ways, is a test of endurance.

Holy Week is certainly a time of intense suffering . . . from persecution to arrest, from beatings to crucifixion . . .

. all while being absolutely innocent.

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My friends, what can we say about a God who comes to suffer?

“Suffering in the Bible is usually understood as a distinctly human experience.”

And when we turn to the Bible, we see plenty of human suffering.

We hear the cries of those suffering disappointed hopes, painful circumstances, violence and sorrow, the vanity of life, fear and anxiety, shame and guilt,

In many ways, the Bible is a litany of human suffering and sorrows.

The Bible suggests that suffering is a reality of being human and living in a sin-filled world.

As human beings, suffering is unavoidable.

And yet . . . and yet.

In our culture, suffering is a bit complicated.

You see, even though we live in a world with suffering, we can believe that we ourselves should not be suffering.

And if we believe that we should not be suffering . . . then any time we suffer, we will be compelled to ask the questions: Why am I suffering? What went wrong to cause this? Why am I being punished?

If pain comes, we think we are being punished.

Suffering has come to feel like punishment.

And so we can look to the cross — and we can look at suffering — and all we can see is pain and punishment.

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And yet . . . and yet.

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Long before Jesus put on flesh and came to dwell among us, the Bible showed us that God also suffers. God has faithfully suffered with God’s people and with the world that God created in love.

As one scholar put it: “at the heart of the Christian faith stands the mystery of a suffering God . . . God’s suffering offers remarkable insight into God’s redemptive love.”

Other religions have deities that stand removed from human suffering.

The Passion of Christ visually highlights a God who came in human form and agreed to endure human suffering.

The cross is an object lesson in God’s love and compassion.

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The word compassion was created by combining the prefix “com” with the word passion.

The prefix “com” is the shortened form of the word commit, and we see the commitment that it brings to the word passion.

The prefix “com” means to be in association with, to be completely with, to be together with.

And when we put passion with com and get compassion, we more fully understand that compassion is to fully together with someone in their suffering.

Christ’s passion is one of the deepest expressions of compassion.

Jesus is giving us an object lesson in the deep love that God has for the world and for each of us individually.

The cross holds mystery and the cross holds complexity, but we do not want to miss that it is a powerful expression of God’s solidarity with us in the suffering that life holds.

We often suffer because we love — and we see that Christ suffers because of God’s love for the world.

Richard Rohr says we suffer when we are not in control. During Holy Week, Jesus gives up His control.

Jesus pushes through suffering and death so we might see that it does not have the last word.

That message is, of course, for next week.

But we don’t want to miss that Jesus still comes compassionately to us when we suffer, bringing love and strength and comfort.

God is totally with us in all things . . . including suffering . . . for God so loved the world.