

Sermon – The Passion (Lent Commitment)
Sunday March 3, 2025

Sermon Series

We're in a series called The God Story. It's easy to focus on our own story. It's easy to get caught up in our own day-to-day lives and problems. Now our stories are important, but here's the problem – if we focus only on our own story, we'll never figure out the meaning of our life.

Why? Because our stories only make sense when we see them through the lens of God's Story. God's story is the grand narrative that spans the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It's a story of creation, redemption, and restoration. It's a story that God invites you and me to play a part.

And it's only when we find ourselves into God's story that we'll finally understand who we're meant to be and what we're called to do – not just individually, but also as a church.

Recap of Last Week

Last week, Pastor Dave preached his first sermon at Cornerstone. Didn't he do a great job? He preached on Jesus the King.

Jesus' kingdom is unlike any other kingdom in the world. Most kingdoms grow through conquest and power, but Jesus' kingdom grows through mission and community. Most kings wear a crown of gold but Jesus wears a crown of thorns. Why did he do that? Because through his death on the cross, he opened up a way for us to be part of his kingdom.

A kingdom that invites ordinary people like you and me to join– not through our earning and striving but through God's love and grace that transform us to become more and more like his Son.

The Passion

Jesus spent the first 30 years of his life in relative obscurity. He spent the next 3 years teaching about God's kingdom. All of this this would lead up to what we'll be talking about today – the final seven days of his life.

These seven days are known as the Passion Week. In Latin, the word passion means to suffer. This time in Jesus' life was so important that all four gospels dedicate at least one-third of their books to it.

Lent starts this Wednesday. Lent is the 40-day period leading up to Easter. It's a time to prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter weekend. After this message, we'll have an opportunity to make a Lent Commitment.

So what I want to do today is walk through the final 7 days of Jesus' life. Jesus knows his ministry is coming to an end, so everything he does is meant to help us see our hearts and motives more clearly.

So as we look at each day in the Passion week, we're going to consider a reflection question that will help us see the things that keep us from living more fully for him so that we can turn our hearts back to him and receive the grace we need.

So with that in mind, let's enter into the final week with Jesus.

Sunday – A King

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Passion Week; it's also the start of the Passover festival. Passover is the Jewish festival that commemorates God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Pilgrims from all over have gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate. And it's on this very day that Jesus makes his triumphal entry into the city.

The gospel writer John says:

... the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!^[d]"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"^[e]

"Blessed is the king of Israel!"

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

**¹⁵ "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion;
see, your king is coming,
seated on a donkey's colt."^[f]**

(John 12:12-15)

There's a lot of meaning and symbolism here to unpack.

For example, why do the people lay down palm branches? In that culture, palm branches represent honour. So when the people lay them down, they're honouring the arrival of a king.

You see, in those days, after a great victory, a king would come home to a triumphal procession.

So when the people lay down their palm branches and shout Hosanna (which is Hebrew for "save us"), they're acknowledging that Jesus is the mighty conquering King who will deliver them.

Now this is a good thing right?

Well, here's the problem. The people are still confused about who Jesus really is. They believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they also believe the Messiah is some kind of military leader who will overthrow the Roman government.

In those days, what kind of animal would a king ride on? A horse. Why? Because horses represent strength and dominance.

But animal does Jesus choose to ride on? He doesn't choose to ride on a horse that symbolizes strength and dominance. He chooses to ride on a donkey – an animal that represents humility and peace.

Why does he do that? He does that to challenge our expectations. He's saying,

- My kingdom isn't the kind of kingdom you're expecting.
- My kingdom isn't about power and prestige.
- My kingdom isn't about having your own way.
- My kingdom is about sacrifice and humility for the sake of others.

This brings us to our first **Reflection Question #1: Like the crowds, How do you shape Jesus to fit your personal expectations and desires?**

Monday – A Priest

We move on now to Monday. Jesus goes to the temple. Now, the temple is extremely significant for the Jewish people. Because for them: It's the place where heaven and earth meet. It's the place where God dwells with his people.

So going to the temple is an act of worship and devotion. But when Jesus goes to the temple, what does he see?

He sees money changers turning the temple into a place of business. He sees vendors profiting from the poor. Instead of being about worship and devotion, the temple is now about corruption and greed.

We often think of Jesus as meek and mild, but when he sees this, he's filled with righteous anger. He overturns the tables, drives out the money changers and rebukes them, saying, **“My house will be called a house of prayer,^[a] but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’^[b]” (Matthew 21:13)**

In this moment, Jesus isn't just overturning tables; he's also overturning what we think about coming to God. Jesus is signaling that a New Priest has come. A priest who will usher in a new relationship with God. Because worship isn't about buildings and rituals, it's about coming to Jesus and giving him your heart.

Which leads us to our the second **Reflection Question #2: Like the money changers, what keeps you from giving Jesus your full worship?**

Tuesday – A Prophet

It's Tuesday now. Jesus is talking to the religious leaders and dealing with the fallout from the temple. Jesus challenges them by telling this parable.

A landowner sends his servants to his vineyard to come home with some of the fruit. But instead of giving the landowner the fruit, the tenants of the vineyard kill his servants. They continue to do this, until finally, the landowner thinks that if he sends his own son, the tenants will respect him. But instead of welcoming the son, they murder him.

What an outrage!

Jesus then tells the religious leaders, You are those tenants. Instead of bearing fruit, instead of fulfilling your responsibilities to lead God's people, instead of teaching them to walk in God's ways you make it all about you! You protect your own power and you exploit the people for your gain. You kill the prophets and you're plotting now to kill God's son.

This brings us to our third **Reflection Question #3: Like the religious leaders, have you become so focused on your comfort that you fail to bear fruit for God?**

Wednesday – A Lover

We now move on to Wednesday. Jesus has had tense encounters with the religious leaders on Monday and Tuesday, but now on Wednesday, something beautiful happens.

Jesus is spending time with his disciples when a woman walks in, carrying a jar of expensive perfume. She lovingly anoints Jesus with it, gently pouring it over His head. The sweet fragrance now fills the room.

Judas, the disciple who would later betray Jesus objects to this. He says that the perfume, which was worth a year's wages could have been sold and the money given to the poor.

So does Judas really care about the poor or something? No. The Bible actually tells us that he doesn't; he's actually a thief who would often steal from the treasury.

Unlike Judas, Jesus however, is deeply touched by the woman's love. He defends her and affirms this act, saying, She has done a beautiful thing for me.

This brings us to our fourth **Reflection Question #4: Like the woman who anointed Jesus, what are you willing to pour out in response to what Jesus has done for you?**

Thursday – A Friend

We now move on to Thursday. Thursday is the day when the people celebrated Passover. Jesus has been longing to share this meal with his friends, but before they eat, he does something shocking. He takes off his robe, gets down on his knees and begins to wash their feet.

This act perfectly foreshadows what the next few days will look like. This act perfectly reveals his glory as the Servant King. Because in that culture, foot washing was a menial task reserved for the lowest servants. The disciples are so disturbed they don't know what they should do.

But Jesus tells them, **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." (John 13:8)**

Why does Jesus do this? He does this to show them what true greatness looks like. In our world, greatness is raising yourself up; but Jesus shows them that in God's kingdom, true greatness is lowering yourself to serve others.

This brings us to our fifth **Reflection Question #5: In a world that loves power, how do you embody a servant heart and love those who are hard to love?**

After Jesus washes his disciples' feet, he celebrates the Passover with them. (We'll talk about this more when we celebrate Communion later on.)

But after they eat the meal, Jesus takes three of his disciples to a garden. He's in deep anguish because he knows the torment he'll soon experience. So he prays to the Father, asking if there's another way. But he also submits to the Father saying, Not my will but yours be done.

Guards then come to arrest him, his disciples abandon him and Jesus is left all alone to stand trial.

Friday – The Lamb

It's now Friday early morning. Jesus is brought to the religious leaders but then they hand him over to the Roman governor Pilate. Fearing the political fallout if the people rebel, Pilate is reluctant to sentence Jesus - so he offers them a deal.

He promises to release one prisoner – Jesus, the one he believes is so clearly innocent and only here because the religious leaders are jealous, or Barabbas, a notorious criminal. Naturally, he assumes the crowd will choose Jesus but incredibly they choose Barabbas. Then hoping a severe flogging will satisfy them, he sends Jesus away to be beaten, whipped and crowned with thorns.

Jesus comes back, all bloodied and disfigured. He's presented to the people, but still they cry out, Crucify! Crucify!

Pilate doesn't know what else to do. So he literally washes his hands of the situation and submits to the demands of the mob.

Emerson and Cox describe what happens next:

A cross-beam is laid across Jesus' flagellated back. He is ordered to carry it to a hill outside the city walls, called Calvary. Here Jesus is stripped naked and stretched out on the cross he has just carried. His strained voice can be heard praying, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

At noon, darkness falls for three hours. Jesus cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' But there is no reply.

Before Jesus breathes his last breath, he has one more thing to say, It is finished. Nothing would ever be the same again. A revolution has begun.

The cross was and is the ultimate of all paradoxes. As Jesus hangs on the cross we are exposed to the worst of humanity and the best of God. The darkest hour of history becomes the place that reveals the brightest light that ever shone... Evil has thrown everything it has at Jesus, but his willing sacrifice means that ultimately evil has been drained of its power. In the most self-sacrificial act in history, we find the most powerful redemptive act in history.

This brings us to our sixth **Reflection Question #6: Like the same people who shouted Hosanna on Palm Sunday and Crucify him on Good Friday, how fickle is your devotion to Jesus?**

Saturday – A Grave

It's Saturday morning. Jesus' body lays in a tomb. The disciples who had loved Jesus and believed that he was the promised Messiah who would restore Israel are left devastated. Their souls are filled with despair, their hearts are heavy with sorrow. So what do they do? They go into hiding.

Saturday is a day of grief and confusion. **This brings us to our seventh Reflection Question #7: Like the disciples who went into hiding, what happens to your faith when you can't see God at work?**

Sunday – The First Day of a New Creation

It's Sunday, early morning. A week has passed since Jesus first rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. So much has happened. Mary Magdalene has been utterly heartbroken by the events of the past three days. Sunday morning is her first opportunity to be close to his body.

So she comes to the tomb and sees that the stone blocking the entrance has been rolled away. An angel is standing before her in radiant white saying,

Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. (Matthew 28:5-6)

She runs to tell the disciples and then runs back to the tomb to look for Jesus' body. Then she hears a voice ask, Woman, why are you crying?

Thinking it's the gardener, she says Sir if you've carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.

And then a familiar voice calls her name – Mary.

Emerson and Cox write: No one says our name like Jesus does. Imagine the familiar cadence of Jesus' voice reverberating lovingly through every cavern of Mary's soul, awakening everything that has died within her...

All the Gospel writers want us to know that the core gospel message – *Jesus has risen from the dead* - was entrusted to a woman. A woman who had been defined by brokenness, torment and abuse before she met Jesus, has become the herald of new creation. Mary's declaration to the disciples – "I have seen the Lord" – turns the pages of The God Story into a whole new chapter.

From this point on, a great redemptive reversal will shape the unfolding narrative. A whole new creation has begun. And the ones Jesus loved will be at the forefront of it.

Reflection Questions

What was Jesus trying to teach his disciples through his final 7 days? Let's take a moment now to review our reflection questions.

As you listen, Look for a particular question Jesus may be prompting you to reflect on during this season of Lent?

- 1. Like the crowds, How do you shape Jesus to fit your personal expectations and desires?**
- 2. Like the money changers, What keeps you from giving Jesus your full worship?**
- 3. Like the religious leaders, Have you become so focused on your comfort that you fail to bear fruit for God?**

- 4. Like the woman who anointed Jesus, What are you willing to pour out in response to what Jesus has done for you?**
- 5. In a world that values power, How do you embody a servant's heart and love those who are hard to love?**
- 6. Like the crowds who shouted Hosanna on Palm Sunday but Crucify him on Friday, How fickle is your devotion to Jesus?**
- 7. Like the disciples who went into hiding, What happens to your faith when you can't see God at work?**

How do these questions expose where you may be resisting Jesus' call? How do these questions stir a desire to turn back to Jesus? Take a moment to reflect. Which question speaks most deeply to your heart? How can you continue meditating on this during Lent?

Lent Commitment

This Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is the 40-day period leading up to Easter. It's a season of spiritual discipline and renewal when you:

GIVE UP something specific that tends to hinder your relationship with Jesus

TAKE UP a spiritual practice that will help you to make more space for Jesus.

These practices help us to prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and his victory over sin and death on Easter.

At this time, please pull out your Lent Commitment Cards. You should have two of them that were placed on your seat.

If you're watching online, we invite you to participate as well. Simply go to our Lent website and you'll find the commitment card online.

[Cornerstone Lent Page <https://cornerstonechurch.ca/lent>]

At this time, let's walk through the Lent Commitment card together. There are three boxes you'll be filling out.

1. First, write your name.
2. Then under "This Lent, I will Give Up" - prayerfully consider what God would have you surrender. What are some things you will give up that are hindering your relationship with Jesus?

You can prayerfully choose from the examples listed on the card.

3. Then under "This Lent I will take up" – consider what you will do to draw closer to Jesus.

Again, you can prayerfully choose from the examples and resources on the card.

In making your commitment, please be as **specific and detailed** as you can. General commitments like "I will give up worrying and think about Jesus more" won't be very helpful. Instead, what is more helpful is making a commitment like: I will give up social media and video games in the evenings and in its place, I will read a Lent Devotional Resource and write in my journal every day.

4. Now, each of you have two cards; please fill out both of them. I'll say more about what to do with them later on.
5. There are also pens in the seat pouches in front of you. If you need a pen, raise your hand and one of our ushers will give you one.
6. So at this time, we invite you to take a moment to prepare your heart. Ask God, What Lent commitment do you want me to make this year? And then write it down on your card.

God bless you as you complete your commitment card!

Communion

At this time, we're going to prepare for Communion. We looked at how on Thursday of Passion Week, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. This meal commemorates God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, but in this moment, Jesus does something revolutionary.

Jesus took the bread and after giving thanks he broke it and said this is my body broken for you. And in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

What did this mean? The disciples have celebrated the Passover meal all their lives but they've never heard these strange words spoken before.

- This is my body.
- This is my blood.

What's Jesus talking about? Jesus isn't just participating in the Passover meal, he's redefining it. Jesus is saying:

- I am the spotless Lamb, the perfect sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world.
- I am the fulfillment of God's promises. Through my death, a new covenant will be established – not through the blood of animals but through my own blood, will your sins be forgiven and your relationship with God be restored.

So as we come to the Table now:

- Let us remember his body broken for us.
- Let us remember his blood shed for us.
- And let us give thanks for Jesus and the life we have in him.
- These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

At this time, we're going to celebrate Communion. All who wish to draw closer to Jesus may participate.

- The ushers will release you row by row.
- When you come up, bring one of your Commitment Cards with you and lay it on the table in the basket.
- Then receive the elements and take them back to your seat where you'll partake there when you're ready.
- If you have limited mobility, we're happy to serve you where you're seated. Simply raise your hand and a mobile server will bring you the elements.

God bless you church as you come to his table.

Benediction

May this season of Lent and your reflections on the Passion of Jesus, encourage you, strengthen you and fill you with his love.

May it challenge us as a church to live faithfully as his people, pursuing his mission, loving our neighbours and shining brightly for him wherever we go.