

“The Comfort of the Same Old Story”

INTRODUCTION

Do you remember when you were a child and you would have your mom or dad read you the same story over and over again before bedtime? With our older son, David, every night he wanted us to read to him the story of David and Goliath from his Children’s Bible. It was the same old story over and over again—the plot never changed, the ending never changed, the cast of characters never changed—but David never seemed to tire of it.

The Passion of Christ is the same old story you heard last year and the year before and the year before that. Beginning with Christ’s entry into Jerusalem—the plot never changes, the ending never changes, and the cast of characters never changes—you know what happens and you know how it ends. Our Lenten midweek services are creative attempts to repackage the same old story in new wrapping paper. For example, I have here: The Crosses of Lent, the Places of the Passion, (and so on). All designed to keep the same old story fresh.

But unlike children who love the comfort of hearing a bedtime story over and over again, most Christians seem to have tired of the same old story—or, perhaps they have better things to do during Holy Week than hearing the same of story of Christ’s passion. Most don’t go to Church Maundy Thursday to receive the Sacrament—and even fewer will go to church on Good Friday to mediate on Christ’s death with their fellow believers.

It’s the same old story—they’ve heard it before and they know how it ends—but they don’t seem to find comfort in it anymore. Maybe it’s because Jesus hanging on the cross is a stark reminder of our sins that put Him on the cross.

BUT THE STORY OF THE PASSION ISN'T JUST ANOTHER BEDTIME STORY THAT YOU REPEAT TO YOUR CHILDREN OVER AND OVER UNTIL THEY FALL ASLEEP. THE PASSION OF CHRIST IS THE SAME OLD STORY THAT BRINGS EVER-RENEWED COMFORT AND HOPE TO TROUBLED SOULS IN A TROUBLED WORLD.

I. We preach Christ Crucified.

The preaching of Christ crucified isn't something that happens only during Holy Week. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthian Christians, "We preach Christ crucified..." and "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." For Paul, the same old story was the heart and soul of his gospel ministry.

Along the lines of St. Paul, one of my favorite seminary professors said, "Gentlemen, preach the cross, for all the benefits you have as Christians flow from the cross." Lutheran Pastors preach Christ crucified consistently and persistently because without the cross, there is no life with God, no atonement, no forgiveness of sins, no payment of sin's penalty.

Indeed, the same old story brings comfort to the soul for from it flows all the benefits you have as the people of God.

II. The Passion of Christ proclaims not only your sins, but also the love of God for sinners.

Some people don't like to see a crucifix—the body of Jesus hanging on the cross—it makes them feel rather uncomfortable. I think it makes them feel uncomfortable because of why Jesus is there—because of our sins. The dead body of Jesus is a stark reminder of our sins.

But another beloved seminary professor taught us that if you took a red marker and colored all the Law passages red and a blue marker and colored all the Gospel passages blue, the Passion of Christ would be purple.

The same old story of Christ's passion isn't only a reminder of our sins, but of God's love for sinners. It's important to remember that while the nails pinned Christ's body to the cross, His love for you kept Him there. Jesus could have called down a legion of angels to deliver Him, but He didn't. As He said in John's Gospel, He willingly laid down His life for the sheep. He willingly was your substitute for God's righteous wrath against sin—and in doing so, Jesus revealed God's great and enduring love for sinners.

The same old story proclaims above all the comfort of God's grace for sinners.

III. The Passion of Christ is the same old story that is always good news to the New Person

Before you were reborn in Holy Baptism, you were under the control of your sinful nature—what Paul calls, “the flesh” and what Martin Luther called, “the Old Adam.” In Holy Baptism, God has resurrected you from the deadness of sin and created you to be a New Spiritual Person in Christ Jesus.

The New Person in you never tires of hearing the same of story of Christ's passion, and the Holy Spirit never tires of telling it. It's the old Adam that wants you to be bored or offended by the cross, because the Old Adam knows that message of the cross targets it for death. It would rather have you looking to be entertained—tickled by new things and new teachings—because it knows the same old story will kill it.

But the New Person in you finds comfort in hearing the same old story again and again because the message of the cross kills the rebellious and death dealing Old Adam, so you may have life with God and have it abundantly.

IV. God never tires of hearing your “same old stories.”

And the same old story of Christ's passion comforts you with one more fact: the story of the cross announces that God never tires of hearing the same old stories from you! He never tires of hearing the same old sins confessed over and over again. He never tires of hearing the same old prayers prayed over and over again. He never tires of hearing the same old laments from you.

The story of Christ's passion announces that God has graciously come down to you in the person of His Son. Through Jesus, He hears your prayers, forgives your sins and heals your brokenness. And as the Paul says to the Romans (Rom. 8:32): "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

The same old story of the cross proclaims what God was willing to give up for you: His only begotten Son into death—and how much He continues to love and care for His people.

CONCLUSION:

This Good Friday, a lot of Christians will have something better to do than to hear the same old story of the Passion of Christ with other Christians. But Jesus had nothing better to do than to suffer and die for you. He didn't say to His Heavenly Father, "I'm tired of the same old story—the same old people doing the same old sins—let's find something better to do." No, the writer to the Hebrews says that Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Jesus was conceived and born into human flesh for you. He was tried and tortured for you. He carried His cross and was nailed to it for you.

There's no greater comfort on earth than hearing the same old story of how Jesus took your sins and your death on the cross so you could have His righteousness and His life.

To quote the refrain from Arabella Hankey's hymn: I love to tell the story, 'Twill be my theme in glory, To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and His love.

In His Name. Amen.