



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Midweek Lenten Worship

Pastor Randy Ott

### **From the Upper Room to Gethsemane**

For many, the month of March that we just entered equates with “March madness,” getting ready to sit on a couch non-stop for a whole weekend and watch nothing but college basketball. Do it a couple weekends in a row and then a Saturday and a Monday evening to find out who the champion is. I don’t know if you are going to watch much of it or not, but if you do watch any of it, one thing that becomes incredibly obvious in these schools that make the tournament, from the players to the coaches to the fans, there is an incredible amount of passion on display in these games, right? You see it in the coaches. He sweats through his suit coat before he bothers to take it off. You see it on the players who leave everything they have on the floor and don’t hold back. You see it in fans that will stand the whole game jumping up and down and screaming so that the next day they have nothing to say to anyone because they can’t anymore. There is an awful lot of passion displayed.

We come together here on Wednesdays for these special Lenten services. I have yet to have anyone jump up and down the whole service yelling their head off, but there is still a lot of passion on display, isn’t there? We use the word “passion” to describe the reading of Christ’s suffering and death. That is one meaning of the word “passion.” But not only that, you see the passion of Christ as we journey from one crossroad to the next with him during these Lenten services. You see the passion that he has, the zeal that he has to bring to conclusion what he came to earth to do—to win his victory that he came to earth for. As you consider his passion, you see one of the reasons why he had to be so passionate and so zealous to accomplish the Father’s will and redeem us from our sins. It’s because the enemies that were gathered against him were incredibly passionate. They had a zeal that goes almost beyond our understanding when you start putting it into modern day terms for what the lengths they were willing to go to so that Jesus would die.

So we see the zeal, the passion of Jesus’ enemies. It’s a short reading—two verses. Early in the morning the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. For months they had plotted out this moment. For months they had wanted to find a way that they could finally get Jesus put to death and now it was all coming to a conclusion. During the midnight hours they had that trial at the high priest’s house. They had gotten the Sanhedrin together, but they knew they couldn’t have that as a legal verdict. So they had to get back together in the early morning. They get back together early in the morning, it sounds like at first daylight, these guys who only recently were together, it seems like they come back together. You might not think about that phrase “early in the morning” a whole lot but I think it speaks volumes to their

passion to wanting to see Jesus dead. You have to remember that this is the Passover that they had just celebrated that night. This is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the high festival of the Jewish year and now its leading up to the next day to get ready for the Sabbath celebration at the end of this festival. They had just celebrated the Passover.

Can you imagine, in the middle of your Christmas Eve celebration, your cell phone vibrates in your pocket and you get up and run to work; you leave your family behind, sitting in the pew. You work until 3:00 a.m. You come back and collapse in bed next to your spouse and then the alarm goes off at 5:00 a.m. and you say “Bye, gotta go,” and you leave Christmas morning to go back to work and work all day again. Do you think your spouse might be muttering about you under their breath as the family is left alone on this big celebration day? As you run off and you are such a workaholic that you have to go and do it now and can’t put it off until sometime later, could you imagine someone doing that today? If you heard that story from a friend, what would you think of that person that went and did that?

That is exactly what these guys did. They left the Passover meal, or shortly thereafter, to get together because the mob had went out and brought Jesus back. They go home and collapse for a couple hours. They get up at daybreak and go back again so they can carry him off to Pilate. They leave family and friends sitting there hanging because they are that passionate about seeing Jesus dead. They are that obsessed with seeing Jesus dead. Notice that it isn’t a split vote. All the chief priests and the elders of the law came to the decision. And it says they bound him and they took him. Here is this guy that didn’t resist the mob, the guy that stuck the ear back on the servant’s head, the guy who hasn’t raised a fist or anything to anyone, and here they all are with Jesus bound and they take him off to Pilate—such a show of force. Why? I think they want to intimidate Pilate. “We are all here. This is important to us Pilate. You better pay attention because we can make your life miserable.” They want to intimidate the people, anyone who might have feelings for the one they had shouted “Hosanna” to a few days earlier, to say “all of the people that are over you in the matters of faith are saying this guy should be dead.”

Intimidation by numbers, that’s how passionate they were. They wanted everyone to know what they wanted Jesus to go through.

Is it any different today? Are the enemies of the gospel any less passionate about separating you and me from the gospel message? Separating us from Jesus? You still hear his name uttered by all kinds of people that aren’t his friends. They use it to curse things. They use it to express frustration so often that maybe you and I hear it so often we join in too and use our Savior’s name to express how frustrated we are with something or to curse something that dares to trouble us. Enemies of the gospel are passionate whether they know they are being used by Satan or not. Satan certainly is passionate at turning the name of Jesus from the sweetest sounding thing to our ears to something to express how upset we are. Enemies of the cross yet today will pat us on the head and tell us how out of touch we are with the times.

Across the country Christian students will be told that “no one believes that anymore. The world wasn’t created by God. It evolved. Everyone knows that.” And we are right back to that large mob leading Jesus to Pilate trying to intimidate by numbers. “Everyone is doing it. This isn’t the 50s. This isn’t Ozzie and Harriet. Sex doesn’t belong in marriage. It belongs wherever it makes you feel good, however you want to use it. Everyone is doing it.” Isn’t that how the opponents of the gospel want to undermine you and me today?—with majority rules?

As you see this passion on display, have you ever asked yourself or thought to yourself, “Where were the disciples?” They were hiding. They were disappearing, right? They may have been keeping watch from a distance but didn’t want to get too close. Are we any different than that today? When the Bible or the gospel is under attack by people as they are discussing it, do we want to kind of just melt into the scenery and find our own locked up room to hide in? Or do we stand up and say “No. That is my Savior you are talking about. That’s your only answer for heaven.” Are we at times more passionate about basketball than we are about our Savior?

When you or I would lay our heads on our pillows this evening to go to sleep, if our certainty of heaven were to rely on the passion that you or I have for Christ, sleep wouldn’t come too soon now, would it? Just like the disciples, our passion for Christ is quite often left wanting. That is why it is so incredibly wonderful for you and me to look again at Jesus as he goes from the Sanhedrin to Pilate and see his passion. We don’t hear him speak. We don’t hear his passion. But we see it. This brings us every confidence in the world that our Savior loves us in spite of who we are and has completely taken away our sins.

Look at the scene at this crossroad again. They bound him and led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor. Just like they did the night before, they bound Jesus again. They tied him up, maybe his arms, his legs, his wrists, his waist; often they would tie someone around the neck and then have this rope or whatever it might have been in the hand of a guard who probably was a little bit sadistic and would demonstrate his control over his prisoner in ways that would inflict a great deal of pain. Just like Isaiah said, he was led away like a lamb to the slaughter. He was led away like this hardened criminal to Pilate and the show of forces around him that said, “We hate you. We want to see you dead. We don’t care about celebrating the Passover. We care about seeing you dead.”

So where is the passion of Jesus? He is meek. He is quiet. He is like a lamb. A lamb doesn’t seem to have a whole lot of passion. How can you see his passion here? You see his passion in his silence. He doesn’t call down an angel to deliver him and break loose the cords that were around him. He doesn’t use his divine power to strike down every one that was gathered around him. He doesn’t retaliate to those who taunted him and beat him. He doesn’t do any of these things because he needs to fulfill Scripture, and like a lamb to the slaughter, goes silently and willingly—not under force, not under compulsion, but under the only compulsion that moved him—his passion and his love for you and for me and for every person in the world. This is his passion. He endures all of this for the people that were yanking the rope around him. He does this for the people that took the staff and beat him. He does this for the people that put the crown

of thorns through his skin and into his head. He does this for the person who pierces his side. He does it for the person who took the hammer and put the nails through his hands and his feet. He does it for Pilate. He does it for Caiaphas. He does it for Judas. He willingly goes to the cross because he has a passionate love for every one of them and every one of us and every one that ever has been and every one that ever will be. He goes to Pilate, a man that was known for his brutality, who mixed the blood of some Israelites with their sacrifices, something that was reprehensible to them. He goes willingly to this man who was known for his brutality because he loved you.

Jesus traveled these crossroads. It's an amazing truth, the passion that he has. It's one thing to make a sacrifice or to lay yourself on the line for the people you dearly love. If your house is on fire and you have a child or spouse in there, you would rush in, whatever danger to yourself, if you firmly believed you could get them out. But what if the person that set your house on fire, after knocking you out, was still in that burning house? Would you really run back in to bring that person out? Jesus did. He did it for you and he did it for me. That's passion. And that is the Savior that we have.

So when we lay our head on our pillow, we know that we are at one with God. Our sins have been forgiven in Christ. We may not serve him perfectly, but we can lay our head on our pillow knowing that tomorrow we want to serve him better because he loves us fully and he loves us freely.