

Making Jesus' Passion Your Passion

A Lenten sermon on becoming more like Christ. “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3-4).

You stand on a train track... Hopefully when a train is not coming! You stand on a train track and look at the two rails. The farther you look toward the horizon, the closer those two rails seem to come until in the distance they seem to become one. That's a good image of “Holy Passion: Mine and Thine.” Thus far this Lenten season we've been looking at two “rails.” One is the holy passion of Jesus Christ for us sinners. The other “rail” is our own passions. The common emotions you and I have, disappointment in others, anger, fear, and so on... These emotions aren't wrong but they do reveal how deeply sin has invaded our lives. Doesn't it make sense that as you look at those two “rails” of Jesus' passion and our passions, they ought to start coming together? In fact, when we start looking toward our heavenly home, shouldn't the two rails become one? **So the question for this service is this: How does Christ's passion become your passion?**

To put that in non-religious words: **What's your purpose in life?** Last week I mentioned the children's sermon. “What has four legs, a tail, and barks?” The child said, “Sounds like a dog but I better say ‘Jesus.’” Once again, don't say what you think the pastor wants to hear. Don't automatically say, “To tell others about Jesus” or some such religious thing. No, get down into your emotions in a serious way. When you wake up in the morning, what's your driving purpose? When you go to work, what is it that excites your mind? When you're with your family, your wife, your husband, the grandchildren, is there something more than just family love that is giving your life meaning? I don't mean to minimize the importance of family. How satisfying it can be! But how did that old song go, “Is that all there is?” Dr. Shirley Bergmann of Concordia University in Seward told about speaking to a gathering of adults, 55-years and up. As an ice-breaker she threw out this question for discussion. “Tell us about your purpose in life.” To her surprise, many of the people said that they didn't have a purpose. I suspect that is true for a lot of us. We are heaven-bound Christians. Thank God. Thank Jesus. But I suspect that many of us wake up each morning without feeling an exhilarating, energizing, let's go out and get them purpose for daily living.

Jesus had a twofold purpose in coming into our world. The first purpose was to go to the cross and pay the price for our sins. In Luke 9:22 Jesus told the disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” There are other passages in the gospels like that. Every morning when He awoke, Jesus knew that His purpose was to go to the cross to pay the price for our sins. Now here's a little technical theological talk to

put in your mind. Jesus' suffering for us is called His "**Passive Obedience.**" The word "passive" comes from a Latin word that means "suffer." Jesus' suffering is properly called His "passive obedience." You've heard about that for years.

But Jesus had a second purpose in coming into our world. That's called His "**Active Obedience.**" I bet that's not a familiar expression to most of you. Jesus' active obedience means that He came into the world to keep God's Law perfectly. As you know so well, you and I don't do that. That's why we confess our sins. God is not going to let anyone into heaven who is not perfect in keeping the Law. "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4). That shuts us out! So Jesus came into this world to do what we haven't done, to keep the Law of God, all the "Thou shalt's" and the "Thou shalt not's" perfectly in our place. That's His "active obedience." That showed up in today's Gospel reading. After Pilate had interrogated Jesus, Pilate said to the people demanding Jesus' death, "I have examined Him...and have found no basis for your charges against Him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death" (Luke 23:14-15). Jesus' "active obedience."

Getting now to your purpose in life... **Since you've been made a part of Jesus Christ by your baptism into Him, doesn't it make sense that you have a twofold purpose for your life in this world just as Jesus had a twofold purpose for coming into the world?** Since He suffered to forgive your sins, his "passive obedience," doesn't it make sense that you put daily energy into **growing in the faith and hope** that are in Christ Jesus, that you know more and more the power of Christ and His resurrection? That's why worship and daily devotion are so, so important. God's Word and Sacraments are effective. Use them and your passion becomes Christ's passion. "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20).

But having a purpose in life also means you want to do something. Listen to what Dr. Martin Luther wrote: ***We have no other reason for living on earth than to be of help to others.*** *If this were not the case, it would be best for God to kill us and let us die as soon as we are baptized and have begun to believe. But He permits us to live here in order that we may bring others to faith, just as He brought us.* (Commentary on 1 Peter 1:3) Remember earlier when I asked you not to say automatically that our purpose is to tell others about Jesus? Of course, we want to do that, but did you hear how Luther put it? First he said we are left on earth to help others. Mission and evangelism are the greatest way to help others but outreach should be part of an overall attitude of helping. Since most of the commandments are about other people, the best way to help others is to keep the commandments. That is, our purpose in life is not only to believe in Jesus' "passive obedience," but also to emulate His "active obedience." It's not that trying to keep the commandments is going to contribute to your salvation, but if you sincerely believe all that we talk about here in church, wouldn't you naturally want to live a more Christ-like life? His passion becomes our passion.

That, I think, is the way to get on track toward living a life of purpose. You'll have to fill in the details according to your own situation, but the overarching Christian purpose is clear. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor killed by the Nazis, wrote this: *It is only by **living completely in this world** that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman,, a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problem, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. **In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is repentance (metanoia); and that is how one comes a man and a Christian.** May God in His mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may He lead us to Himself.* (Letters and Papers from Prison, Collier; pp. 369-370)

Keep looking toward that heavenly horizon. More and more Jesus' passion becomes your passion. Amen.