



## SUNDAY SERMON

# The Passion of Christ - The Roles We Play

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Where are you in the story of Jesus' Passion? Where are you now after this beautiful sung version? We know the story well, and I imagine we hear it slightly differently each year depending on what is going on in our own lives, what is going on around us. For me, this year, the story brings up the roles we play in the current tragedies of this world. For many years and in many churches, I felt as though I was supposed to identify with those people in the crowd as Jesus was tried before Pilate. When the story was read in parts, the congregation was always given the lines "Crucify him; crucify him!" And I would join in, ruefully wondering, I suppose, what I would have done had I been there.

This year, I wonder more broadly, about the many roles in this story. I do wonder about the Jewish authorities who hand Jesus over to the Romans, yelling for crucifixion - "Away with him! Crucify him!" But I also wonder about Judas who betrays Jesus for money, and Pilate who finally hands Jesus over. I wonder about poor Peter, who probably loves Jesus as much as anyone, who can't even acknowledge that he knows him because he is so afraid. And I wonder about those who stand by, doing nothing - the disciples sleeping in Gethsemane, all those who desert Jesus on the cross.

People - this is what can happen when tragedy and destruction and cruelty unfold in our presence. The long ago tragedy of the Passion is told in gorgeous music - we hear it and marvel at this story at the core of our religion. But when this story unfolds in real time, here and now, what do we do? What roles do we play? Have you ever been Judas, an active perpetrator of harm to another, knowingly, perhaps motivated by greed? Have you ever been Pilate, attempting to listen, to be fair, and at least trying to step back from the deadly authority to crucify, but then caving to protect your own skin? Surely, at one time or another we have all betrayed someone we love with a lie, with a denial, perhaps even wept for the the shame of it.

Have we ever been like the religious authorities calling for blood, seeking over the top revenge against those who trouble us? Or how about just going along with unjust and incompetent governance? Perhaps this is our most likely role - we are just bystanders or avoiders, those who claim no agency and hence no responsibility despite evil and destruction going on around us. When I say around us - here we could be talking about everything from domestic abuse to neighborhood conflict and bullying, to city-wide conflicts over housing and schools, to the ravages of gun violence. We could be talking about wars going on for so long we barely think of them any more. Or we could be talking about high crimes and misdemeanors.

On this night, this Good Friday night, where does goodness lie? In the story, goodness, God's presence in our humanity is strung up on a cross and mocked by those who pass by. Jesus, the very embodiment of God's presence, dies.

*Continued*

### DATE

Good Friday  
Friday, Mar. 30, 2018

### PREACHER

The Rev. Susan Flanders

What happens when God's presence in us dies? What happens when God's presence in you dies? What happens when we ignore, or stifle or kill God's presence in one another? What happens when the roles we play belie the love and the goodness we are meant to embody? What happens when our public life belies the love and goodness we know and wish it would embody? What do we do? What should we do?

We have no answers to these questions tonight, only the searchings of our hearts. We wait for a new dawn, and new hope and new life for us all. Amen.