

**FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 50:4-9a**  
**SECOND LESSON: Philippians 2:5-11**  
**THE GOSPEL: Luke 19:28-40**

**The Sunday of the Passion**  
**April 14, 2019**

“Compassion-Capacity”  
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell Nelson  
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The capacity to have compassion is rooted in the understanding of the word compassion; it means to suffer with, to be with. Often passion is understood as the passion of love, but this is the passion of God’s love for you and I, opening us up to have increased capacity to love the Lord and to love one another and to receive the grace of knowing that you yourself are loved.

I love the scriptures, of course, and the way that they shape. Earlier this morning, I broke my glasses and so I ran over to CVS to buy some glasses. If I had not gotten these, you would have heard scripture in a different way. The scripture says Jesus loves you, and that is the impact of the scriptures on this palm Sunday, on this Sunday of the Passion, as we shift into the dynamic of holy week. There is this beautiful phrase. I love the phrase of the first reading from Luke chapter 19: The Lord needs it. If anybody asks you why you are doing it, say “the Lord needs it.” I think about how often I think I need things and I just love that phrase. I’m not sure how the people responded when they saw their beautiful little cold being taken, but for you and I, I just want to resonate upon that. The good news of our Lord is that the Lord needs us, the Lord needs you. The basis of holy week is the incredible capacity, the compassion of Jesus Christ for the sake of each and every one of us, those who have been, those who are and those who will be, this love that is beyond limit and this understanding that the Lord needs it. I ask that you shift it to the Lord needs you, the Lord wants you, the Lord wants me, the Lord wants this world, the Lord needs us because of his great compassion for us.

Then the text from Isaiah, this phrase to listen to God as those who are being taught. I think of life itself as increasing our ability to be compassionate. Now, some of us get jolted in life enough that we start struggling, we start turning inward. It is almost like we are unable to hear. For any of you who have been going through life where you cannot hear, you know that your isolation increases because you are not able to engage in conversations, so it is absolutely important to have a hearing aid or supportive devices. The verse says to listen as those who are being taught, and continues “morning by morning he wakens my ear.” This idea is that as we go through life experiences, we are not to turn simply inward but to be

broken open, to hear and to have compassion, and to have your heart broken is a part of God's plan.

I know it will be a beautiful Lenten journey with you. And during this holy week, I know I am hearing the words afresh in the light of my father's death. It is important to know that we, as people of faith, are lifelong learners and so that anything that happens in our life can allow us to experience humbleness and breaking open. This word "breaking" is *knosis* in Greek. In the Philippians text is this description of Jesus: "Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." This breaking open is dangerous but, to me, the way of faith is to break open.

Marjorie Sherbocker, I was able to know her only the last few days of her life, but I was so touched by the assisted living community she was a part of, because the people who worked there took the risk of loving. For any of you who have ever worked in a hospital or perhaps in a long-term care facility, wherever it is you've been working with people, it is easy to know that you are going to lose some of these dear people, so you can start protecting yourself by playing it safe. What touched my heart with Marjorie's community there was that as we had a prayer at the end of her life, we had eight of the staff there who were praying their hearts out with us. It was beautiful. We also had a little doggie, which is always great to have dogs involved with the community of faith. I just want to say to you and to me, we are the people who do not play it safe. We are the ones who open our hearts to have the capacity of God's compassion, to at least touch and allow us to move forward.

Passion, or living life deeply, and I'm not talking about just the ups and downs, I'm talking about the depth of life, the depth of life for you and me. Walter Brueggemann, who is a wonderful theologian and preacher and Old Testament extraordinaire full of wonderful knowledge, said that passion and living with compassion is actually a prophetic agenda, meaning it is part of prophecy, it is part of God's words coming true. He uses this term "royal consciousness," which is kind of like the powers that be. He the royal consciousness means to eradicate. Passion is the capacity and readiness to care, to suffer, to die, to feel, and this is the enemy of royal consciousness, which is designed to keep people satiated so they do not notice misery and to block out the cries of the denied ones. This, he quotes is very close to what Marx did as a critique of Christianity and of religion. Brueggemann says it this way, "This type of religion, this royal consciousness, is to be an opiate, a drug, so that no one discerns misery alive in the heart of God." We, even though it may be difficult, are called to have the capacity to have our hearts broken open, to have mercy, to extend grace and to be part of this prophetic agenda. This is what the story of Christ's passion means to me.

I want to conclude with encouragement to hear the words of the passion story anew. I want to deeply experience this holy week. I've teased you as I've gotten to know you, right? I said make it your best Lent ever. That means by going deep into the scriptures, deep into your

reflection upon God's love. Let's make this our best holy week ever by going deep into the compassion of God's love through Christ.

I discovered a poet, a minister of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, George McDonald. He's knew to me. Perhaps some of you have heard of him before, but to me he's just incredible. He wrote a work called "The Diary of an Old Soul." He wrote it this way to God:

Thy will be done. I yield up everything.  
Life is more than meat, more than health,  
and the body more than arraignment, more than wealth.  
The hairs I made not, thou art numbering.  
Thou art my life.  
I the brook, thou the spring.  
Because thine eyes are open, I can see.  
Because thou God art thyself, tis therefore I am me.

We can see. We can hear. We can be who we were made to be, beloved by God. The Lord needs us and we continue to live life as lifelong learners. Life that breaks us open to receiving and sharing the passion of God's love. This is part of a prophetic agenda. You and I are part of God's will here, the movement of God's love for this world. In this, we can truly see and be who we are, beloved. My last encouragement is this: Do not play it safe. Do not turn inward. Allow the risk of living with passion to be the hallmark of your life, because the world so desperately needs it. Let Christ's compassion break open your gratitude and break open your compassion, and may I join with you in this movement of God. Amen.