

*Sermon for Palm & Passion Sunday, 20.iii.2005
St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania
The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Saint Matthew 26:1-27:66
10:30 a.m., Holy Communion - LBW Setting 2*

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

*He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,
and began to be grieved and agitated.
Then He said to them: "I am deeply grieved, even to death;
remain here, and stay awake with me."*

-- Matthew 26:37,38

Nowhere in Matthew's Gospel is the humanity of Jesus stressed more than here, in these moments when Jesus confronts His coming suffering and death with grief, with emotional agitation, with the simple desire not to be left alone by His loved ones in that hour. Nowhere, more than here, is the humanity of God, God's profound love for us and patience with us revealed with such clarity. But Our Lord finds the Disciples--and of the Twelve those three who were the very closest to Him--*asleep*. Though He upbraids them, He seems not to be surprised.

Then, *and now*, we nod off, rather than remain awake with Christ, with the Son of Man in His grief in this world. Sometimes our depressed or uncaring slumber takes the form of simply tuning out of the suffering of our neighbor. We tell ourselves, as the Disciples may have thought in the presence of Jesus' grief, 'I just don't know what to say or do,' when all that is asked or wanted is that we be present to one another, sometimes without words or heroic deeds, sometimes not there to 'fix' our neighbor's problem but simply not to leave him or her alone with it.

And who is awake with Jesus, who is on guard for Him, when the innocent are persecuted among us – be they the vanishing African American families of rural York County, Jewish families of our northern county suburbs, unwanted newcomers of dark skin or foreign birth, new to our rural landscape and/or anyone else who does not fit the

self-concept of those who self-appoint themselves to uphold the community standards to which they think the rest of us ought to subscribe? ‘Oh,’ we yawn, ‘there will always be those extremists who fly their Confederate flags and spray paint their swastikas. What, after all, can *we* do against such stupidity?’ And then we roll over to resume our nap, forgetting that Jesus will look to see whether we are still keeping vigil with Him.

It is painful to think of such things, inconvenient and potentially dangerous to become too concerned about them or vocally indignant. ‘And ohhhh,’ we stretch, rubbing our eyes after each news broadcast, ‘it is worrying that our nation seems to be drifting toward a reliance on the sword of military might as a solution to more and more problems on the world stage, worrying that Jesus rebuked Peter for being too ready to do the same, but, after all, is history not going to

take its course regardless of what little people like us think about it?’

Our Lord Jesus Christ does not expect each and every one of us to single-handedly change the world and the course of history in a single lifetime, though that calling does seem to come to some. All he asks us to do is to stay awake with Him when and where He grieves in this world, for this world. Where is He calling you and me to remain awake with Him, to be with Him in His grief? Ask of Him that question, and you will not have to wait long for the answer.

✠ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sin by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. ✠ Amen.

S. D. G. !