

Weekend of the Passion: "Does the Passion of Our Lord Move You?"  
Matthew 26:14-27:66  
March 28-29, 2026  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Scripture is meant to "get to us": to enlighten our minds but also and especially to shine light in our hearts. Not all Scripture is equal, though. My heart is not warmed by the dietary laws in Leviticus or the dimensions of Solomon's temple in 2 Chronicles. My emotions **are** set in motion, though, by the story of our Lord's Passion and death. When I was young and Palm Sunday rolled around each year, I confess I used to think, "Oh, no, not this long Gospel again." But then I came to realize that every year different details of the story caught my attention, jumped out at me, made me sad, made me reflect, made me wonder. Something different each year, because of all I'd experienced since the last hearing and because of where I found myself currently, never exactly the same place, and sometimes a vastly **different** place, than the last year.

So what moved **you**, this year?

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For me, I don't remember ever being so gripped by the detail of Judas "changing his mind" about betraying Jesus (Matt. 27:3). Maybe that's because I'd usually hear, "Judas **repented.**" Sometimes I hear "church words" like "repent" or other religious code language, and go into auto-pilot, not really paying full attention, subconsciously thinking, "Yeah, I've heard this before; let's move on, I know this." But to hear that Judas "changed his mind" after Jesus was arrested, then wanted to return the money and presumably turn back the clock, is so ridiculous, so sad. I wanna say to him, "Guy, that train has left the station." Did he **really** think there'd be any other outcome than arrest, trial, conviction,

death? Then I think of the way this is sometimes interpreted, apart from the money motive: that Judas was actually trying to force Jesus' hand, thinking that if He were arrested He'd rise up as the military Messiah Judas wanted Him to be, then save Himself, calling on His heavenly Father to call down those 12 legions of angels Jesus mentions. Then I realize there are times I realize **I've** done something stupid or wrong, have "changed **my** mind" about what my course of action **should** have been, and by God's grace have been able to "call the horse back into the barn" before damage was done. Other times I, too, like Judas, have set something harmful in motion that **couldn't** be stopped, or I've been too **late** to set something **positive** in motion; but then I **asked** and **received** forgiveness. It looks like Judas got to the point of regret, but never to the stage of asking and accepting forgiveness. Or he **did** ask for forgiveness (of **God**, since none was forthcoming from the chief priests and elders), but then despaired of ever receiving it. The problem there would be that he was focusing on his sinfulness rather than on God's mercy. Because surely God **would** have forgiven Judas, even for betraying God's Son. Jesus lived and died and rose to show us that God **will** forgive **us** also, for **any** failure of love. My other take-away from this year's Passion reading is that Jesus is **delivered up** by the very people He dies to **deliver** from death, hell and the devil. It's shocking but true that the Son of God, the Holy One of God, **our Lord Jesus dies for spiritual losers: us!** St. Paul recognizes how nuts, how counter-intuitive that is, in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5:

*<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us... <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.*

What we've just heard about our Lord's Passion and death is referred to as "The Greatest Story Ever Told." English-speaking people first heard it 500 years ago this month, when the Tyndale Bible was smuggled into England in March 1526. It had to be snuck in, under wraps, because the powers-that-be had **forbidden** the publication of a Bible translated into English. John Tyndale was the one who had masterfully translated Christian Scripture from New Testament Greek into English. Sir Thomas More headed up Henry VIII's posse to find Tyndale and deliver him to "justice"; he referred to Tyndale as a "serpent," "son of iniquity," and "hell-hound in the kennel of the devil."<sup>1</sup> Once the English authorities caught up with John Tyndale, they strangled him and burned his body. His offense: delivering the Word of God, including the Greatest Story Ever Told, to the people of God in their own language. He was not the 1st or the last to be martyred for translating the Word of God into the language spoken by the people of God, in various times and places.

The Word of God, along with the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, is the means of grace, the channel through which God's love and light flow into our lives and flood our hearts, cleansing and purifying them. We'll hear more of this Greatest Story Ever Told on Thursday and Friday nights at 7:30. We'll hear its culmination in the Resurrection on Saturday evening and Sunday. Come and see it all unfold. Come and hear "what wondrous love is this." Kneel in awe. Rise in jubilation. Nothing is more important this week than recognizing these days as holy, devoting time to bring our bodies to worship, to lend our hearts and souls to the Lord, to sink our roots into the Word of God, to receive our Lord's Body & Blood in Holy Communion. Nothing is more important. Amen

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Loconte, "Five Centuries of a Forbidden Bible," *Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2026, on-line.

