



[Click link for Matthew 26:14-27:66](#)

## The Passion Play

This week's gospel is a drama played out in multiple acts of betrayal and one glorious act of love. It is a tragedy turned to triumph by the greatest encore of all time. In Matthew's epic account of the Passion, we are not just spectators... we are participants... we are beneficiaries.

The crucifixion of Jesus comes as no surprise in the narrative we have been following since the Nativity. Jesus has known where his life was heading and he has freely shared his insight with us. Now is the time to face up to the forces of evil that have stalked him for so long.

Does he fight or does he flee? He has run before, why not now? He will not fight and he will not run, because his time has come. This is why he came. He has preached a New Covenant based on love of God and neighbor. He has demonstrated his power over evil, over illness, over death. Now is not the time for signs and wonders. Now is the time for sacrifice... the time to take our betrayals to the cross, to banish sin and give us eternal life.

Jesus will not simply lay down his life. It will be torn from him in the most fiendish form his enemies can devise. But more painful than the

nails, the lash and the thorns, will be the path of betrayal he must travel to the cross.

In Gethsemane, Jesus asks his apostles to stay and watch while he prays. They respond by snoring through his agony of anticipation. Theirs is a betrayal of indifference, followed by a betrayal of cowardice in their flight when Jesus is arrested. Judas, whose name has become synonymous with betrayal, adds a flourish to his treachery by betraying Jesus with a kiss. Then in total contempt for Christ's message of divine mercy, he throws away God's gift of life on a homemade gallows.

Peter is a serial betrayer that night. Three times he denies Christ. But, unlike Judas, Peter reaches out for forgiveness and God hears him. Then there is the fickle mob of casual betrayers. A week ago, they greeted Jesus with: Hosanna. Now their cry is: Crucify him. They are shallow. They are erratic. They are bored and easily distracted. They root for the winning team... but only when the winning team is winning.

Most of the world's sins are banal acts or lazy omissions. They are the work of casual betrayers, like us. You know how it is: We tell ourselves that we're the good guys. We don't set out to do evil. But sometimes the right thing is

just so inconvenient. And some sins look just too good to pass up. Besides, what difference does it make? That Sunday school stuff is okay for kids, But, real life is full of gray areas.

Padding your expense account is no big deal. Who could blame us for an office flirtation? Nobody knows; so nobody's hurt. Sure, everybody cheats on their taxes. Just don't get caught. Did you hear what my wife said to me? No wonder I lost it. So, I pop a few pills. You would too, if you had my problems. All this stuff about the poor is really overdone. I can't save the whole world you know. Those blacks, or gays, or immigrants... you fill in the blank... they make me uncomfortable... they're just not our kind.

On and on... our betrayals just keep piling up. But Jesus takes them all... the big ones and the little ones... your sins and mine... every one of them gets nailed right to the cross with him. They are raised up to die and get thrown in the tomb.

So, it turns out that all along we have had a starring role in the Passion of Jesus. You might say that it's always been all about us. Our sins brought Christ to the cross. Our sins died there. But that's not the end of the story.

By God's saving grace, this play has the happiest ending ever. In Christ, our sins are dead and gone... while the risen Jesus takes a miraculous Easter curtain call. From the cross and from the tomb, we rise with him triumphant... to the ovation of eternal life.

Thank you, Jesus. Your life, death and Resurrection have set us free.