

High St Uniting Church Frankston
Mark 14 and 15

The passion of Jesus



He was working on a passion project.

If you wish to succeed, find your passion, and follow it.

Beyond any romantic usage, the word passion describes something that grabs all your interest and energy and attention. Passion is what drives you to do your best or to achieve and aim. And Jesus takes the disciples to Gethsemane; a name that derives from the Aramaic for an olive press, which is an interesting metaphor for the pressure that he will be under in a few hours. He takes the disciples to the

garden and then separates himself, throws himself on the ground and prays for another way. A prayer so intense and passionate that Luke describes perspiration falling like drops of blood. Passion. We could read that as meaning that Jesus' passion was to live and continue the ministry of healing and teaching, and he was wanting God to open a way for that to happen. But the story shows a deeper passion. The passion to follow the will of his Father; "not what I want, but what you want." That is the passion that sustains him through the trials and temptations and suffering that is to come.

And maybe that is why the word passion came to have a church meaning of describing all the terrible things that Jesus went through at the hands of the religious leaders, Pilate, and the Roman guards. It was only Jesus' passion to follow the will of God that sustained him, that gave him the resolution to remain silent under accusation, to speak boldly when questioned, and to stay strong under abuse and, quite frankly, torture.

Jesus had told the disciples that all of this was going to happen. In Mark's Gospel, he tells them three times on the way to Jerusalem. It seems, from the Gospel stories, that they either didn't hear or didn't want to hear and understand. The common understanding of Messiah still held sway in their minds, and they were looking forward to triumph and glory. Not in the far-off, divine future but in God's Messiah led kingdom that restores Israel by throwing out the Romans. The arrest of Jesus showed their lack of understanding and lack of passion. They all deserted him and ran away; except for Peter, whose devotion drives him to follow the guards to the Chief Priest's house but doesn't give him the strength to admit to being a disciple. We might call Peter passionate given the intensity of his outbursts and actions in many stories, but when it counted, was it passion?

The religious leaders were passionate. Passionate about obedience to the Law; the laws that controlled daily living as well as ritual observance and worship. We may doubt the validity of their faith and write them as obsessed with religion and public appearance, but we can't doubt their passion. But that passion blocked them from seeing the heart of the Law – love. The Law, and their identity as the people of God, became more important than the cry of the prophets – do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God.

So, if Jesus is our example and guide, we are left with the question – is your faith a passion? Does it grab your interest and energy and attention? Does it drive you to do your best and to achieve the aim of being more Christ like? I know it's a high standard; maybe too high for most of us. How can you be Christ like on the way to the aim of being Christ

like? Maybe the question is more like, is your faith passionate enough to do better than the disciples, who deserted, and denied and ran away?

Or maybe the question is – is your religion a passion? Are you more interested in the rules and standards and expectations of the religion than in the living out of love and compassion and mercy?

Beyond the commemoration of the Passion of our Lord, beyond the religious observance of this festival season, these are the questions that confront us. As followers of Jesus, we look to see what he is doing and follow, we look to see what other followers are doing and check ourselves, we look to see what scripture is presenting and ask, “Is this our life? Is this our passion? Is this our way?” As the shadow of the cross becomes the way of the cross, where is our place as followers of Jesus?