

Passion Sunday – April 4-5, 2020
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They knew what was coming, and they could not face it. So they ran.

Do you remember the movie, “Steel Magnolias?” Toward the end of the movie, Julia Roberts’ character becomes very ill. Her whole family, and many friends, gather at the hospital. But, as the men in the family see that her death is drawing near, they start to hide. They see what’s about to happen, and they seek a way to escape what’s happening. They leave.

But, the women stay. Sally Field says, “I’m her mother. I was privileged to be there when she came into the world, and I will be privileged to be here when she leaves.” She knows that love requires her to stay – to face her daughter’s death when it happens. The male characters saw it coming – and they chose to run.

Jesus saw it coming – and he chose not to run. Jesus saw death coming, and he chose to face it, because that was what love requires.

A little geography will make this clearer.

Imagine that this is ancient Jerusalem. It’s built on a hill, and it has walls around it. Near the eastern wall of the city you find the temple, and the home of the high priest. Down there are some steps and a gate - one of the few ways out of the city at night.

Here, in the middle, is the Kidron Valley, with a road leading north and south. And over here is the Mount of Olives. Jesus and his disciples ate the Last Supper over there, in the old section of Jerusalem. Then, they would have gone down those steps, walked through the Kidron Valley, and up the Mount of Olives.

Matthew says that Jesus took Peter, James and John to Gethsemane. We know where that is – it is on the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus falls to the ground, praying, “Father, if possible, let this cup pass me by. But not my will, thy will be done!”

Now, if you are in Gethsemane, you can look across the Kidron Valley. You can see the stairs, Jerusalem’s city walls, and the home of the high priest. Matthew tells us that a large crowd leaves Caiaphas’ house, and comes over to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. Which means, that even while Jesus was praying in Gethsemane, *he could see them coming*.

Matthew tells us that all of this happens at night. So when the crowd of soldiers and guards left Caiaphas' house, they would have been carrying torches.

Jesus was praying at Gethsemane, pleading, "let this cup pass me by..." but even as he was praying, he could see the torches of the crowd coming down the steps, coming up the Kidron Valley, heading up the side of the Mount of Olives.

All that time, he could see them coming. Which also means that – *he could have escaped*. He could have melted into the crowd of people camping on the hillside that night. He could have hidden.

He saw them coming. He could have escaped. But he chose to face what was coming.

He could have escaped. But he loved us enough to stay... he loved us enough to be arrested... he loved us enough to be put on trial... he loved us enough to die on the cross...and be buried... and to rise... *because that is how we can rise*. He loved us enough to face death, so that when we face death, we can follow his footsteps, from death to life.

He could see the terrible thing coming toward him in the night, but he did not run away. And thank God he did not run!

JESUS did not run. But sometimes, WE see what's coming, and are tempted to run, or hide, or find a way to escape. Sure, there are times in life when challenging things happen suddenly. And we say, "I didn't see it coming!"

But, many times, we SEE the hard thing coming, and our first instinct is to... flee.

You start a job, but then you see how much effort it will require...you're tempted to flee.

You get married, but then you begin to see what love is going to require: you're going to have to give more than you thought, and change more than you want...you're tempted to flee.

Your parent, or your spouse, your child, gets sick. You begin to see what's coming - the *caregiving*. The attentiveness. Your whole life is about to change. You're tempted to flee.

You live in a time when a medical concern keeps most of at home for most of the day. Homeschooling the youngsters for the next few months. Youngsters who have to be nice to their siblings for the next few months! A time of stress. People buying more than they need at the store, making it harder for others. The economic impact of all of this. We see some of what's coming. Are we quoting that old TV commercial? "Calgon, take me away!"

You get more serious about faith. You draw closer to Christ, then you see what's coming. Christ is going to ask you to love your enemy. He's going to ask you to care for the poor. He's going to ask you to forgive; to be chaste; to put people ahead of money; to stop being angry. He's going to ask you to commit yourself to justice, and honesty. He's going to ask you to defend human life, and defend the orphan. You see it coming. Are you're tempted to flee?

When you are tempted to flee from what love requires, remember Jesus in Gethsemane. He sees what's coming, but he loves us so much that he stays. When you are tempted to run from what love requires, remember Jesus. The torches tell him what's coming. But he loves us so much that he does not hide.

When life hands you a cross – remember Jesus, on the side of that hill. He could have escaped, but he loved us so much that he accepted his cross, so that your cross and mine could lead to eternal life.

This holy week, we focus on Jesus Christ, who loves us so much that he did not run from the consequences of loving us. He paid the price to stay faithful. He gave everything... for us. He taught us how to stay where we should stay, and be who we should be. Turn to him, pray to him, when you see the torches coming. He always gives us the strength to do what love requires.

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