

I want to just say a few words about the shift that happens on Palm Sunday, the shift in change in mood. Our service goes from the fun of the procession and the palm waving to the solemn reading of the passion narrative, which we're just about to join in with. And this mirrors the shift that happened on that first Palm Sunday. The Palm Sunday story begins with Jesus's triumphal, joyful entry into the streets of Jerusalem, but it's soon overtaken by the desperate sadness of the crucifixion. And the reason for this shift and change in gear is found embedded in the word passion and the various meanings that there are of that word. I don't know if you've ever wondered why it is that we call the reading we're about to hear the passion narrative, but it does, I think, help to understand the nuances and the background of that word.

It broadens our understanding of this familiar story. The word passion goes back to a Latin word, "pati", which gives rise to a number of words in our English language, one of which is passive. And the theme of passiveness, passivity is key to an understanding of what we're about to hear. It's important to remember that in this long gospel reading, there's a significant shift as Jesus moves from activity to passivity. And it begins right at the beginning of the reading where it says, "Jesus is handed over." And we get that phrase more than once. Listen out for it in the reading, "Jesus is handed over." He's betrayed. He's given to into the hands of others. And the result of this handing over is that Jesus goes from being the subject of the verbs in the reading to the object.

There's not so much of him in these chapters of Jesus doing things, there's more about things being done to him. He was betrayed, he was arrested, he was stripped, he was mocked, he was spat upon, he was crucified. All these things were done to him. The verbs associated with Jesus in this reading aren't active, they're passive. Jesus is still the center of the story, but not as the initiator of events, rather as the object of the events that are done to him. And another word from this same Latin root of "pati" is passion, in the sense of having a passion for something. It's an emotional

word. We talk of having a passion for something if we're willing to suffer for the love of it.

St. Paul writes about the crucifixion in this way. "God proves his love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And let's remember that as we hear this story of the passion again. What's motivating Jesus as he's put through this ordeal, what enables him to persist and carry on and not abandon the task that is set before him, is his great love for his people. That's what motivates him. That's what we remember as we hear this story, that Jesus is doing all this out of great love for his people, even for us. And we'll sing a great hymn later to remind us of that, that our song is love unknown. This story of Jesus's final days is an account of Jesus's passivity as he is done to, at the end of his earthly life. It's also the story of his passionate love for his people.

*[This was followed by the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Matthew (26:14-27:54)]*