

Minister's Message – March 2004

The Passion of the Christ

Most reviews I have heard or read of the movie *The Passion of the Christ* emphasize the violence and brutality inflicted upon Jesus. People emerge shaken and weeping after seeing the film. They are shocked at the amount of blood on the screen. Then come the arguments about who was responsible for treating Jesus so horribly – was it the Jews or the Romans.

I thought to look again at the Bible to see what is written and what the emphasis is in these historical accounts of the death of Jesus. These are the same accounts upon which the movie is supposedly based. I did not find there an emphasis on violence. So I conclude that the focus upon the physical suffering of Jesus and the search for who was responsible for his death are more a reflection on Hollywood than the Gospels.

Read what the doctor Luke writes in the gospel. *Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him, and having blindfolded Him they struck him on the face* (Luke 22:63). That was the Jewish leaders. Then *Herod with his men of war treated Him with contempt and mocked him* (23:11). The Roman soldiers *twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head and began to salute him ... they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him, and bowing the knee they worshipped him. And when they had mocked Him ... they led Him out to crucify Him* (Mark 15:17-20). That is what we read in the gospels. They treated Jesus with savage brutality. But this is all that is written. Note that the mocking and blasphemy are featured as much as the violence in the gospel accounts. Thankfully children can read the Bible, even if they cannot see an R rated movie!

The gospel accounts do not emphasize the brutality. We are not left thinking how terribly cruel men can be. We are not left thinking I wish I could do something to help this poor suffering Jesus. We are not left feeling Jesus was defeated when we read the gospel. Rather we know, because Jesus had told us again and again, that he had to die, that he came to die, that it was God's will for him to die (Mark 8:31, Acts 2:23).

The movie may remind us of how Jesus died – and even of the 'when' and the 'where' he died. The use of the original languages brings this out. But the New Testament is written that we might also know **why he died**. Jesus himself said as he was led to Calvary – *do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and your children* (Luke 23:28). What did he mean? He did not want us feeling pity for Him but for ourselves. Why? Because in the eyes of God we are the ones who are condemned. Every human being will be judged by God. And every human being is a sinner and will suffer the penalty for their sin – namely death. Unless –

Unless what? Well that was why Jesus willingly went to the Cross. That is why he suffered as he did. At any time he could have freed himself from that violence – but he endured. He stayed on the cross because he pitied **you**. He knew this was the only way you could be saved from death. He died in your place so that you would not suffer the wrath of God for your sin. God *made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Do you know why Jesus died? You will find out if you prayerfully read the Bible (the New Testament in particular). And if you confess your sin and believe in Jesus Christ, then you have eternal life.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon