This is an interesting Sunday in the church. It used to just outrightly be called Palm Sunday. Then over the years it because Palm/Passion Sunday. Now it’s Passion Sunday with Palm Sunday in parenthesis. The emphasis is more on the suffering and passion of Jesus than a ticker tape parade. As if to say that when Jesus comes to us, we say too easily I think that he’s bringing us something we really want. When in fact, this isn’t exactly case.

Here’s the issue. We say it in our baptism service. When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way. “When Christ calls a man (woman), he bids him come and die”. In Galatians 2:20 we read “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. Yeah, we tend to want God without this dying part.

God has a gift for you to be sure. But in order get there, you will be crucified. That’s the rub here. There will be a death that happens to you. And believe me, you won’t like it all that much at the time. Often we even here theologies that say that Jesus will die, soI won’t have to. And that’s why I think more and more the emphasis on this Sunday is the Passion of jesus. It’s about the crucifixion that Jesus will have to face. But also about the crucifixion that we will all have to face as God chooses us to be his people.

This is one of the most interesting aspects of just about every single person in the Bible who was chosen by God to be one his people. They almost instantly have to face death. Abraham the father of our faith called to go a new land. What’s the first that happens to him? He goes down to Egypt, but he’s afraid that because his wife is so beautiful, they will kill him, so he sells her to the king. What’s the first thing after Abraham’s son Isaac is born that God asks him to do? Yeah, kill him. You just can’t believe it. What happens to David, after he is anointed to be King of Isreal? Yeah Saul wants to kill him, and he has to hide in a cave. In Exodus, Chapter 3 God calls Moses to lead Isreal out of slavery. In Chapter 4 what happens. God tries to kill him. He fails, but he tries to. You can’t make this up. What happened to all the prophets that God called? It wasn’t good. Jesus spoke of it himself, “You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you”. Anyone want to be prophet? What of Jesus teaching. If you try to save your life you will lose it, but those who lose their lives will find it. Take up your cross and follow me. And Dallas Willard in his most eloquent way, puts the issue before us today in the best possible way. Jesus died, so that I might die with him. Jesus has his passion this week. His crucifixion. What does that mean for us that if we follow that we will be crucified too?

Sometimes that’s hard to answer. I think its because we often only think of the crucifixion and death of Jesus in physical terms. And the pain and suffering as his physical pain. So we focus primarily on the cross being that wooden thing that Jesus was crucified on and the physical pain of being nailed to it. I remember when I was a kid there was this need to sort of focus on what it would actually be like to be nailed to the cross. The pain, the suffering, the tortured breathing, the thorns cutting into Jesus head. Poor Jesus. That was the crucifixion. Well, that probably won’t happen to us will it? So the crucifixion become something that only happened 2,000 years ago.

And then sometimes we’ll talk the crosses we have to bear. And this seems to be something like our aches and pains and hassels we have a work. A problem with a relationship, or financial issues. Just sort of putting up with people in general. You’re car breaks down. And we might see our crucifixion as participating in the brokenness of life. It’s our health problems and relationship problems, and sin hang ups. So we put up with it as best we can and bear our crosses. And we think that’s crucifixion. It’s just putting up with things.

But today in our Gospel lesson what it means for us to be crucified is something quite a bit different. And it’s brilliantly brought out in the story of Peter that we have in our Gospel lesson today. Peter today gets crucified. And what happens that is his crucifixion? Yeah, he has to face a truth about himself that he didn’t want to face. Peter has pretty high opinion of himself as the story begins. I will never betray you. He is so certain. He is so full himself. So full of his own conviction. He is the true believer isn’t he. And Christians can get like this sometimes. So sure we’re on God’s side. So sure of ourselves. So God has to come and save us. And lead us to that place where we can see the truth of who we are. You have to face a sober truth about yourself that only God can show you. Because you would never do it on your own. It’s like dying to this image that you have of yourself. And it’s rough. It’s not a physical pain. But it’s just like dying.

Luke brings this out in our Gospel lesson today. Even Jesus crucifixion in this story doesn’t really happen on the cross. I won’t read the actual account of the crucifixion from Luke but look at if you want to. and you won’t find any reference there to any kind of suffering or pain. There’s no nails, no vinegar, no leg breaking, no spear in the side, no falling to the ground. No crown of thorns. No references in Luke’s passion story to any kind of physical suffering or pain at all when Jesus was on the cross.

Because that’s the not the real crucifixion here. The real crucifixion happens where in Luke’s story? Its in the garden from our Gospel lesson today. Jesus sheds his blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. That’s where we see his anguish. Jesus is praying, and it’s in his prayer that he is crucified. Please. Please God, this can’t happen to me. I cannot face this. Take this away. But how does God respond? An angel from heaven appears and give Jesus strength to anguish until he sweat blood. Jesus doesn’t want to face this. But the angel comes so that he can. Because the crucifixion here isn’t physical, Its the emotional anguish. And the same was true for Peter. How hard it must have been to realize that he wasn’t the great and mighty believer he thought he was. They’re both being crucified together, at the same time.

I’ve been doing a little cancer stuff for the last few months. They found this little spot on my prostate. I had a prostate biopsy about a year ago. And it was pretty good, with some cells they weren’t sure about. But my PSA is going up, so I had an MRI a while back, and then about 10 days ago I had another prostate biopsy. A targeted biopsy they called it. And you know maybe how it goes, wait for a week and we’ll call you and tell you if that little thing is cancer. And I’ve had cancer before, and given pretty bad news, so there was part of me that sort of blew it off. Been there done that.

But Friday afternoon I looked at my phone, and I’d gotten a call from my doctor. There it was, there were the results staring at me in my Voicemail. And even though when I finally opened it, my report was fine, I didn’t want to open it. I was kind of a tough guy and nothing is going to shake me or my faith. I can face anything that comes my way. I’m mister I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Right? We love to present this great image don’t we? I can face cancer no problem.

But you know what happened? I wasn’t who I thought I was. I had kind of a mini garden of Gethsemane. A little crucifixion. I didn’t want to look at it. I didn’t want to deal with it. That’s what being crucified is like. I remember the same thing happened when I got divorced. Sometimes I still don’t want to face it, or admit it that I’m divorced. I forget sometimes. It doesn’t fit, even now. I still have this image of myself where that can’t happen to me. Sometimes I just don’t even want to say it. But being crucified comes with being God’s chosen. We will be crucified with our Lord. Together we will face a truth that otherwise we would not. And that’s really what Holy Week is meant to be about.

God sent an angel so that Jesus could face what he didn’t want to. God helped Peter face what he never could have. And God will help us face whatever it is that we need to face as well. Because when we learn that we can deal with these things, rather than avoiding them, we discover what it means to really live. Crucifixion happens so that real change can happen. It’s God’s way of forming a new creation, a new person in us. Yup, I’m not what I thought I was. God is making me into something new. Amen.