

## 0. Introduction:

- \* You know, I am living in Munich. 45 Minutes away to the south near the Alps, a small village is located there, called: Oberammergau.
- \* Have you ever heard this name? Oberammergau?
- \* Have you ever heard of the Passion Play that takes place in that little village?
- \* **[PP – Picture 1]** In a performance lasting almost five hours, the residents of Oberammergau – and only them were allowed – re-enact the last five days in the life of Jesus.
- \* **[PP – Picture 2]** In the early 1600's there was a terrible plague in that part of Germany and the leaders of the village made a vow to God that if He would spare the lives of those still living, they would put on a play about the passion of Jesus every 10 years.
- \* The Passion Play was first performed in 1634 to honor that vow. And it has been performed every ten years for the past 420 years.

\* **[PP – Picture 3]** I recently met two of the actors and they told me how fascinating it is to be a part of such a great production.

\* But on the other hand, one said, "It's terrifying how intensely and often you can put on a play like this (110 times in 2022) and yet how far away you can still be from Christ. Today, the vast majority of the people who act in the play have no personal relationship with Christ. For them that is not relevant.

\* **[PP – Picture 4]** They are all acting in something that deeply affects their lives and yet they are blind to what the story is really about.

\* He said: "It is hard to see, how excellent they play and how hardly they ignore the impact of Jesus."

\* He told me that it is very difficult to endure this ambivalence on the part of many of his fellow actors.

\* **[PP]** *Summary: It is **possible** to engage with the story of Jesus, without engaging with the divine person of Jesus*

\* In Jesus' time, there was a similar ambivalence. As he was teaching, people could see his actions and miracles and hear his words of him directly.

\* But most of them ignored his message and didn't understand what he was offering them.

\* Matthew 9:35-36 clearly shows us what this looked like:

**[PP]** *The Harvest Is Plentiful, the Laborers Few*

*35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.*

*36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

### **[PP]** **1. Christ's passion for the people**

\* The story about Christ reveals to us a life full of passion.

\* Jesus Christ is a very passionate God, a deeply moved person. So emotional and passionate about our relationship to the Father that he leaves heaven.

- \* Christ gives up everything because God has a passionate longing for you.
- \* He leaves the most beautiful place in the universe, Heaven, to meet you and to reconcile you to the Father. (2 Corinthians 5: 17-20).
- \* And that's what we're learning from the Bible this morning:
- \* **[PP] Quote: For Christ to come to earth and lift you up as a treasure, is more important to him than to stay in heaven and to live in paradise.**
- \* Christ is passionate and loving toward his creation. That's what has always distinguished him from the false gods.
- \* He lived his life on earth with all his strength and all his passion - to serve, tell and model to people what it means to live life with God at the center.
- \* He constantly demonstrates this great and extraordinary love for people but he also would not tolerate anything what violated the holy worship of the Father.
- \* Remember how his passion turned to anger when he saw merchants going about their business in the temple!

\* **[PP]** We read in verse 36: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

\* The word "compassion" means much more than what we express in everyday language by "deep concern".

\* It tears his gut apart, it hurts him deep inside.

\* He feels pain because the people wander without guidance and protection. They are vulnerable.

\* God's passion for people that we read about in the Bible is the same passion he has for us today.

\* Jesus' passion toward you personally goes just as deep. Not any less.

\* Most of all, his passion for you is fully expressed on the cross. There is no higher price to pay than to die for someone.

\* **[PP]** **God would rather die than live without you.**

\* And if you think he doesn't know you or see you, you've been deceived by a lie.

\* The truth is, he knows what's on your mind, what makes you happy and depressed, and where you're living above or below your limits.

\* **[PP]** *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20).*

\* He sees you with passionately loving eyes and courts you again and again: Come, let's walk together today, tomorrow and for eternity.

\* He says to you: Let's go together and make a difference in the world.

\* **[PP]** *Summary: It is **impossible** for Jesus to see us without having passion or compassion for us as lost and helpless sheep*

## **[PP]** 2. Christ's focus on the people

\* Jesus is very focused on his mission. He does not let himself be distracted from it.

\* He obediently goes step by step on the path that has been planned from the beginning with his Father.

\* As Jesus travels around, he reaches many people, he preaches everywhere, lives with the people, heals and explains how life can be experienced in the Kingdom of God. Life can be different with Jesus.

- \* Just like today, people had forgotten how good God is, how much he longs for them, how great is his passion for us, how much he wants to be our shepherd.
- \* In their journey through life, they lost sight of God, and through Jesus.
- \* He brought Himself back into the conversation
- \* By showing his love and passion and he revealed his plan for us to be reconciled to the Father.
- \* A question: Do you feel “helpless and harassed”? How has Jesus shown himself to you recently?
- \* Did he remind you of his presence and love? This could be the moment for you today to hear his welcome into his kingdom again, or maybe for the first time.
- \* **[PP]** The bible says: *1 Timothy 2:4: God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*
- \* Whether you might be exploring Jesus, or you have known him a long time, we must still choose to follow him.
- \* Perhaps this is the moment of decision for you. It is an invitation for you to say yes to experiencing a new or renewed life.

\* Outside we have prayer partners you can talk to afterwards. Or come to me. Who you talk to is not important. Important is your decision. And I will give you a small pause to hear this invitation and respond to God.

[small pause to respond]

\* **[PP]** *Summary: It is impossible for Jesus to see us without having focus on us.*

\* Two small verses with very dense and deep truth. Passion and focus.

\* **[PP]** Let's read with another two verses in Matthew 9:37 and 38: *37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

### **[PP]** 3. Your passion for the people

\* If we let this affect us now, a question immediately arises for me: Do I also have passion for people?

\* Do I have a passion for them because they do not yet know the good shepherd?

\* Do I care that people are lost? Does it move me?



- \* Or do I not care? Do I ignore it?
- \* Do I believe that there is a harvest?
- \* That is the question that is unmistakably before us.
- \* Put a little differently: What attitude do you have toward those who live without the Shepherd?
- \* What attitude do you have towards those who think quite differently, live quite differently, are inclined towards different politics, ignore God, and live with a different moral standard?
- \* The crucial question is not if God has passion. The crucial one is whether I have passion?
- \* The Bible uses the greek word *agape* even more than the word for passion.
- \* **[PP]** The word *agape* denotes a divine or God-inspired unselfish love, especially including the mutual love of Christians. *Agape* is a volitional choice out of appreciation is due to every person.
- \* Because God loves you this way, through him you can love this way. It is possible. Not by your own power, by His power.
  
- \* You can get so wrapped up in yourself that you lose sight of others.

\* I know this and have experienced it myself. And it was a very hard experience to have to admit that I had lost the love, the *agape*, and passion for those who had not yet chosen to follow Jesus.

\* God asked me this about three years ago, "Dirk, do you love people? Do you have passion for them because they have no shepherd?"

\* I had to answer, "not very much".

\* I was so busy planting churches. I was so busy taking care of my own flock in the church. I was so busy from the many things that were on my calendar every day.

\* I lived in my own world where the shepherdless had no place. Especially not those who didn't live by my standards and who thought very differently.

\* That was a shock for me. I am a pastor, which means "shepherd", but I had lost my passion for his sheep. So, I did what is written in God's word: I started praying. Not just to send myself into the harvest. But first for forgiveness.

\* Then again and again, every day, I prayed for love and passion for the shepherdless. That I may see them as Jesus sees them. That his eyes become my eyes. To be moved by what moves Christ.

- \* You know: Neither you nor I can change our hearts by ourselves.
- \* I can choose to give my heart to Jesus and ask for love, but I can't change it myself.
- \* That is why God asks us to pray and give our heart. Because only the Creator can deeply change the heart and soul.
- \* But first it needs the insight, the true realization of how I really am and how I feel.
  
- \* And I will now leave you with this question for a minute. After a short prayer.
- \* [Question] Do you love, do you have passion for the people who are without the Shepherd?
- \* Prayer: Lord, by your Holy Spirit, give me and us wisdom and insight into how my/our heart is. Amen.
- [Silence]
  
- \* Kurt has been preaching in recent weeks about what it costs to follow Jesus.
- \* To follow Jesus costs the dedication of my heart. This is where discipleship begins.

\* And: allowing God to change my heart the way HE wants it.

\* **[PP]** The cost of discipleship is giving your heart to God and not wanting to determine how it turns out.

\* Following Jesus is not working with distance, is not working without my heart, is not working without the commitment of my heart.

\* Your head is not enough. He wants your heart. At first.

\* Some ask: What will I get? The disciples also have asked.

\* You don't go away empty-handed, you don't just give yourself and that's it.

\* Devotion is followed by experiences with God.

\* Devotion is followed by joy and hope through God.

\* Devotion is followed by depth and wide through God.

\* Devotion is followed by love and passion for people.

\* But: It has something to do with your decision to surrender yourself and your heart.

**[PP]** *Key Point: For believers, it is **possible** to have passion for lost sheep (family, friends, co-workers, neighbors) while we have a passion for Jesus.*

#### **[PP]** 4. Focus on the people

- \* I ask most pastors, leaders, churches: how much do you and your church pray for this, in your smallgroups, at home and everywhere, that people will come to faith in Christ and become his followers?
- \* Jesus says here to pray that he will send people to work in the harvest.
- \* If you look at what the Bible says about prayer, it is clear that we are also to pray for people to find Jesus.
- \* Focus on people is seen by the fact that we pray for them.
- \* If you don't pray for others at all, you don't focus on them. So, we have a gauge of how much we focus on them.
- \* Prayer has the greatest influence. It is the best and most important we can do for those who have

not yet accepted the invitation of Christ as Shepherd.

\* And that is what we must/should do. For them.

\* **[PP]** Key Point: If we pray for a more passionate relationship with Jesus and the people and for Him to take a greater role in our own daily lives, it becomes more **possible** for us to be part of the harvest.

### Summary:

\* God has great passion and love for people. For you and for those you love. But especially for your neighbor who may be annoying you or your co-worker who is very demanding.

\* **[PP]** *John 3,16: "For God so loved the world (your name, your neighbors name,...) that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

\* Jesus is focused on his mission. To love people with passion and invite them to follow him into the Kingdom of God. Love in.

\* Third, I asked about your passion and love for people. The appreciative love of God that I choose

to have. The agape. And that also needs the devotion of my heart.

\* And lastly our focus on the people who are not yet following Christ. Do we pray that they come to faith and do we know what moves them in their entire life?

\* [BAND is coming on stage]

I would like you to think about four ways to respond, to what you have heard today. Choose one, not all.

**[PP]** 1. If you know the story of Jesus, but it does not have an impact on you – like the actors in the Passion play in Oberammergau – think about this: What is the reason? Why is He unimportant to you?

**[PP]** 2. Think about your passion. Then begin praying for more passion. Then begin to show more passion for others. Continue...

**[PP]** 3. Pray that God will send people into the harvest. Be a „harvester, yourself“!

**[PP]** 4. If you have made a decision today experiencing a new or renewed life, see one of the

volunteers outside the workshop center what is important to do next.