



# The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ

Ray Vincent Adams

*Libretto by Cynthia Bourgeault*

Dear Friends,

*What you will be tasting here is the libretto I created for “The Passion,” an original Holy Week oratorio composed in 2003 by Ray Vincent Adams, founding conductor of the Aspen Choral Society. Ray Adams (1952- 2013) was a talented conductor, composer, brilliant and brave creative spirit, and a close personal friend. “The Passion” was the fourth and final in a series of original oratorios that poured out of him during the early years of the 21 st century, following closely on the heels of his “Angels” (1999), “Revelation” (2001),” and “Requiem” (2003). For this new choral setting of the Passion narrative, Ray wanted a new libretto, scripturally rooted, but portraying Jesus’s paschal self-oblation not in the traditional modes of victimhood and scapegoating (all too often tragically directed at the Jewish people), but in terms of a free offering of conscious, universal love. It’s a message that still needs insistent replaying—perhaps even more today than in 2003. Wisdom Waypoints is grateful to be able share this libretto once again, now in a handsome new format created by Andrew Breitenberg, for your own Holy Week deepening and reflection.*

Cynthia

## Part I The Farewell Discourse

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**Jesus:** My children, I will be with you only a little longer.  
JN 13: 33 Where I am going you cannot follow now.  
JN 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled;  
Trust in God; trust also in me.  
In my Father’s house are many mansions.  
I go to prepare a place for you.  
JN 14:18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.  
JN 16:20 You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

{ORCHESTRAL BRIDGE}

**Chorus:** Behold, I give you a new commandment:  
JN 13: 34 Love one another as I have loved you.  
JN 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches.  
JN 15:9 As the Father has loved me, I have loved you.  
Abide in my love.

**Jesus:**  
JN 16:19 A little while and you will see me no longer.  
JN 14:30 The prince of this world is coming.  
JN 16:20 You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.  
JN 16:23 But take heart: I have overcome the world.

**Narrator:** Having loved those who were in the world,  
JN 13:1 He now prepared to show them the full extent  
Of his love.

## Part II Gethsemane

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{ORCHESTRAL INTRODUCTION}

**Jesus:** Come, now, let us depart,  
And go into the olive grove to pray.  
My soul is troubled, even unto death.  
Stay here and keep watch with me.

MT 26:38

{ORCHESTRAL BRIDGE}

**Jesus:** Abba, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me.  
Yet not my will but yours be done.  
Into your hands I commend my spirit.

MT 26:39

PS 31:5

**Chorus:** Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies,  
It remains a single grain,  
But if it dies, it shall yield a rich harvest.  
Those who sow with tears will reap with joy.  
Those who go out weeping, sowing the seed  
Will return with songs of joy, carrying the sheaves.

JN 12:26

PS 126:5-6

{ORCHESTRAL BRIDGE}

**Jesus:** What, are you sleeping? All of you asleep!  
Exhausted from sorrow,  
Could you not watch for a single hour?

LK 22:46

MT 26:40

{ORCHESTRAL BRIDGE}

## Part III The Prince of this World

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**Narrator:** While Jesus was still speaking,  
A crowd of Pharisees and palace guard arrived,  
And the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was  
Leading them.

LK 22:47

**Jesus:** Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?

*Twisted, fugal chant builds as phrases are added from Men's Chorus:*

Draw your swords!  
Stand your ground!  
Turn them back!

**Narrator:** And one of them struck the servant of the high priest,  
Cutting off his ear.

**Jesus:** NO MORE OF THIS! Am I a rebel,  
That you come for me with swords and clubs?  
Every day I was with you in the temple,  
And you did not lay a hand on me.  
But this is your hour, when darkness reigns.

LK 22:51

**Chorus:** Blessed are you when they shall revile you,  
Persecute you, and falsely say all manner of evil  
Against you for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for  
Great is your reward in Heaven. In the same way they  
Persecuted the prophets who were before you.

MT 5:11

**Narrator:** Then seizing him, they led him away  
To the house of the high priest.

{MUSIC BEGINS; CROWD CHANTS}

**Men's Chorus:**

*(The first two lines are an essential ostinato on which centers the entire section. The following lines are added, combined, overlaid, as the intensity builds.)*

(COLLATED  
FROM ALL  
THE GOSPELS)

This man calls himself the Son of God,  
The Christ, Messiah, the Anointed One.

He sets himself above the Law, the prophets.  
He heals on the Sabbath,  
Befriends the poor, the outcasts  
Dines with prostitutes! Tax collectors!  
Dances to a music all his own  
That melts our hearts of stone...  
Calls himself the Son of God...

**Caiphas:** Are you the Son of God?

LK 22:70

**Jesus:** I AM... I AM...

**Men's Chorus:** To Pilate! To Pilate!

{CHANT REPRISSES WITH MORE INTENSITY}

**Pilate:** Are you King of the Jews?

LK 23:3

**Jesus:** My Kingdom is not of this world.  
If it were, my servants would fight for me.  
My Kingdom is from above.  
For this I was born  
And for this I came into the world:  
To Testify to truth.

**Pilate:** What is Truth?

JN 18:38

**Chorus:** I am the Way, the Truth, The Life  
No one comes to the Father except through me;  
You shall know the truth and it shall set you free.

{MEN'S CHORUS THEME RE-ENTERS; TURMOIL BUILDS}

**Pilate:** I find no charge against him.  
What would you have me do?

**Crowd:** Crucify! Crucify!

**Pilate:** Shall I crucify your king?

**Crowd:** We have no King but Caesar!  
CRUCIFY! CRUCIFY

## Part IV On the Cross

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**Narrator:** And they led him away to be crucified,  
Lk 23:26-7 To the place called Golgatha, the Skull.  
Wailing and mourning, the women who loved him  
Followed behind him, those few who still cared.

**Jesus:** Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me;  
Lk 23:28-9 Weep for yourselves and for your children.  
The time will come when you will say,  
'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs  
that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.'  
(*Women's chorus may repeat.*)

**Narrator:** Two criminals, were also crucified there beside him,  
Lk 23:32-3 One on his right, the other on his left.  
Upon his head, a crown of thorns,  
Above him t hung a sign:

**Men's Chorus:** (*a chant, building from a hissing whisper*)  
JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS

(*This merges with following, a darker reprise of the earlier "crucify" chant*)  
Mt 27:40 You, you who claimed you were the living temple,  
SAVE YOURSELF!  
Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God,  
The Chosen One, the Christ!

(*Music builds. In a brief eye of the storm, Jesus cries out*)  
**Jesus:** Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.  
Lk 23:34

**Men's Chorus:** Save, save yourself if you are the Son of God.  
Mt 27:42

**1<sup>st</sup> Criminal:** He saved others; himself he cannot save

**2<sup>nd</sup> Criminal:** Do you not fear God, since you are under the same  
Lk 23:40-1 Sentence? We are punished justly for our deeds, but  
This man has done no wrong.

{INSTRUMENTAL BRIDGE}

Lk 23:42 Jesus, remember me when you come into  
Your Kingdom.

**Jesus:** Truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise.  
Lk 23:43

{ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE MOVES THIS GLIMMER OF PARADISE BACK TO HELL}

**Narrator:** It was now the Sixth hour, and darkness came over the  
Lk 23:44 Whole land. The sun ceased to shine, and the veil in  
The Temple that hid the Holy of Holies tore in two.  
At about the Ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice:

**Jesus:** Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?  
Mt 27:46 My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?

**Narrator:** And he gave up his spirit.  
Mt 27:50

**Women's Choir:** Into your hands I commend my spirit  
For you have redeemed me, O Lord, O God of Truth.

*Echoes for solo voices:*

Lk 23:43 Today you shall be with me in Paradise.  
Mt 27:54 Truly this man was the Son of God.

*SILENCE. Then the following chorale from Convent of the Incarnation,  
Fairacres, Oxford, England)*

**Chorus:** In stillness nailed,  
To hold all time  
All change  
All circumstances  
To Love's embrace.

## Part V Remembrance

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{ORCHESTRAL BEGINNING}

*Soprano solo*

**Magdalene**

SONGS 3:1

All night I lay on my bed  
I looked for the one my heart loves.  
I looked for him but did not find him.  
I will get up now and go about the city  
Through its streets and squares;  
I will search for the one my heart loves.

SONGS 8:6-7

For love is as strong as death,  
Its ardor as unyielding as the grave.  
It burns like a blazing fire,  
Like a mighty flame.  
Many waters cannot quench Love.  
Rivers cannot wash it away.

{CHORUS COMES IN GRADUALLY WITH REPRISE FROM PART 1}

**Chorus:** Behold, I give you a new commandment:  
Love one another as I have loved you.  
I am the vine, you are the branches:  
Abide in me, as I in you.

**Men's Chorus:** I am the way, the truth, the life  
No one comes to the Father except through me.  
You DO know the truth and it HAS set you free.

**Full Chorus:**

1 JN 4:7-9

Dear friends, let us love one another  
for love comes from God.

Everyone who loves has been born of God  
And knows God, for God is Love.

1 JN 4: 16

Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

**Magdalene:**

SONGS 8:6

Place me like a seal upon your heart.

1 JN 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

**Jesus:**

JN 11: 25-6

I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me will live,

Even though he dies.

And he who lives and believes in me

Will never die.