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A Passionate Life

How passionate are you? Maybe that question needs some expansion and clarification. For how many things, people, events, or ideas do you have boundless enthusiasm and powerful emotion? Maybe an answer to that question could serve as a measure of your passion.

But in the Christian world, the word passion has quite another meaning. It has been connected for centuries with the last events of Jesus' life. The word passion derives from the Greek verb meaning to suffer, and it came to be linked to the sufferings Jesus endured before his death on the cross.

Wanting never to take for granted the cost to Jesus of those last hours of his life, the church in Europe found many ways to memorialize the events he experienced. For example, the church of the Middle Ages reenacted scenes from Jesus' life during its worship services, and found the reenactments to be enormously popular. Eventually, as the dramatic action was elaborated and extended, the reenactments took on significance beyond church worship. Touring groups performed marvelous theatrical shows on the story of Christ's passion throughout the Middle Ages.

The curtain has long since descended on most of these so called passion plays. But astonishingly enough, one little town in Germany has regularly performed its passion play with deep devotion for almost four hundred years. It seems that in the year 1632 bubonic plague ravaged Europe. And the villagers of the little hamlet of Oberammergau vowed that if God would spare them from the plague, they would in gratitude perform a passion play every ten years from then on. They were spared. And they've been performing every decade ever since.

2010 is a performance year, and we've recently returned from leading a little band of travelers to see the famous play. We were among the half million expected visitors to Oberammergau this year who will watch the seven hour performance, involving the efforts of over two thousand performers, musicians, and stage technicians, all of whom are residents of the village. The phenomenal interest in this performance and the durability of its draw to faithful people across time and geography says something, doesn't it? To what would you attribute its success?

Maybe it's all about passion ... both Jesus' passion and our own. Maybe the chance to be reminded of self-giving love, offered at great personal cost has

When we consider the extent of the self-giving love offered in Jesus' last hours of life, who wouldn't react with passion? That is, who wouldn't be moved by powerful emotion and motivated by boundless enthusiasm to respond?