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What is Passion?

Revd Nathan Falla

We use words all the time, sometimes we can be very careful and deliberate about the words that we use; carefully crafting sentences so that they convey exactly what we would like on paper, or really thinking about what we are going to say so that our message is fully communicated. At other times we may just use words and vocabulary more carelessly because on the surface they say what we want them to say, without thinking deeper about what the words actually mean. In the church we can be guilty of using jargon as a shorthand for complicated theological terms, taking for granted that people will instantly know what we mean and not taking the time necessary to explain.

Sunday marks the fifth Sunday in Lent also known as Passion Sunday or to give its full title the First Sunday of the Passion, as we begin Passiontide recognising that Holy Week is getting ever closer, but what does it all mean? When we think of passion we may think along the lines of the Cambridge Dictionary in terms of either “*a very powerful feeling, for example of sexual attraction, love, hate, anger, or other emotion,*” or “*an extreme interest in or wish for doing something, such as a hobby, activity.*”

However, there is a more ancient meaning too. The English word has its roots in the Latin *passio*, which means, simply, “suffering.” Its first recorded use is in early Latin translations of the Bible that appeared in the 2nd century A.D. and that describe the death of Jesus. The Latin word was borrowed prolifically in Old English religious texts, where its meaning remained exclusively theological. But when the Normans invaded Britain in the middle of the 11th century, their conquest infused thousands of French words—including passion, which also referred solely to the sufferings of Jesus—into the spoken language. The record is sketchy, but it seems that once passion was in use in both languages, it began to develop broader meanings. The first new senses in English referred to martyrdom and physical suffering or affliction, and by the 13th century, passion was being used to refer to any strong emotion, which leads us back to where we started

In the word passion as applied to the context of the church we have both the strong emotion of love that runs throughout the story of Jesus last days, but we also have the story of Jesus helping. These two understandings help us to comprehend that as a church we are preparing to reflect upon the suffering of Jesus’ journey to the cross, and the amazing love that is shown for the whole world through Jesus death on the cross.

In the words of Charles Wesley:

*Come, O everlasting Spirit, bring to every thankful mind all the Saviour's dying merit,
suffering still for humankind. True recorder of his passion, now the living faith impart,
now reveal his great salvation, preach his gospel to our heart. Come, O witness of his dying; come,
remembrancer divine, let us feel your power, applying Christ to every soul, and mine.*



Extravagant Love

Online Circuit Service Sermon | Rachel Dalby

Readings: Isaiah 43:16-21 & John 12:1-8

1. Online Service

Join us from 10:30am on Sunday for our online Circuit Service which this week is led by Rachel Dalby

Find it on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email!

2. Zoom Opportunities

If you're feeling isolated, are not ready to be face to face yet, or can't, but are happy to meet on Zoom, there is a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: mellwatson42@gmail.com.

There is also still a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: philipholmes8100@gmail.com.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)
08:10am – 3rd April

A Passion for Hospitality: I was in prison
On Passion Sunday the service comes from the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula in the Tower of London. Major Alison Stone from the Salvation Army, and Chaplain at HM Prison Wormwood Scrubs, preaches on the role of prison ministry, and former MP Jonathan Aitken reflects on his conversion to Christianity whilst serving a sentence following his conviction for perjury which eventually led to him becoming a priest.

4. Radio Nottingham

Listen every Sunday, at 8am, to a live church service on BBC Radio Nottingham. (Online or on 95.1-103.8 MHz FM for free.)

Today we become aware of the shadow of the cross, as we draw closer to Holy Week and Easter. There is a sense of the approaching sadness and suffering, as we sit with Jesus and his friends and Mary anoints his feet as if lovingly and lavishly preparing him for death. Yet, although there is sadness, this is not a time of despair or hopeless resignation. Far from it. Even Judas dismisses Mary's act as sentimental extravagance, we know that this suffering will be the gateway to something of vital importance. The echoed words of the prophet "Forget the former things – I am doing a new thing" bring with them a wonder and excitement for the gathering momentum of Jesus' time on earth. This is to be greater than the escape story of Exodus. This rescue will be God acting in an extraordinary way.

There are a series of character sketches in our reading from John. There is Martha serving at the table. There is no doubt that she loved Jesus, but she was a practical woman and the only way in which she could show her love was by the work of her hands. Martha always gave what she could. It is just as possible to serve Jesus in the kitchen, as it is to stand at the front of church and lead worship. Martha knew where her talents lay and used them to show her love for her friend Jesus.

There is the character of Mary. Mary took the most precious thing she possessed and in love gave it without thought to Jesus. Love is not love if it nicely calculates the cost. It gives its all and its only regret is that it has not still more to give. In his commentary, William Barclay, quotes the story *The Gift of the Magi*. A young American couple Della and Jim, were poor but very much in love. Each had one unique possession. Della's hair was her glory; when she let it down it almost served as a robe. Jim had a gold watch, which had come to him from his father and was his pride and joy. It was Christmas Eve, and Della had exactly \$1.87 to buy Jim a present. She went out and sold her hair for \$20 dollars and bought a platinum fob for Jim's precious watch. When Jim came home and saw Della's hair had been cut, he stopped and stared. It was not that he did not like it or loved her any less; for she was lovelier than ever. Slowly he handed her his gift; it was a set of expensive tortoise-shell combs with jewelled edges for her lovely hair and he had sold his gold watch to buy them. Each had given the other all there was to give. Real love cannot think of any other way to give.

The third character is Judas. I believe that Jesus was aware of the true nature of Judas. He had been put in charge of the money that was gifted to Jesus and his followers. He must have had some fiscal capabilities and perhaps Jesus thought that Judas would gain some sense of honour, by showing him that he truly loved and believed in him, by giving him this responsibility. It must have been distressing for Jesus that his friend and disciple, was stealing money from the gifts made to Jesus and his disciples by generous donors. It is revealing that Judas objects to Mary's wonderful act of love, on the grounds that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor. On the face of it, a perfectly good objection, but we know that in fact he did not really care about the poor, perhaps he was

thinking of how much money he could gain for himself from the sale. How often do we miss the opportunity to show love to someone? How often do we pass up the chance to care for someone because we are either too busy doing, or insisting that others do, the right thing, the proper thing, first - or - because we are thinking of our own desires like Judas?

Mary has truly understood both the trajectory of Jesus' special vocation and the nature of God. The extravagance of her act mirrors the extravagance of God's love. In the Lectionary readings for last week we got a glimpse of that extravagance in the story of the Prodigal Son. God is the one who welcomes home those that the religious leaders believed did not deserve to be welcomed home - he is one who eats with sinners and tax-collectors and teaches them the joy of being re-united to God.

We see it again today. Here is a God whose love knows no limits. The pouring out of Jesus' own life later that same week for the sins of the world will also be an extravagant act of love. What kind of love is this? This is the love that pours itself out. Love that is measured out, whether it be in time, or in our own internal sense of our available energy, is not really love at all. Love always gives its best - and it does so at the moment of opportunity, it does so now, today, with the people immediately around us, and not at some future date, when the people we are to care for may, in fact be dead and gone. Love is an immediate thing, an extravagant thing, like that love showed by Mary, it is not dealt out a bit at a time and only to those who seem to us to qualify for it.

How often do we stop ourselves or someone else, from showing love to another person because we believe that someone else, or some other cause, deserves attention more? How many families have difficulties simply because everyone is so busy trying to be fair and share everything equally that absolutely no one ever has the feeling that they are loved fully - that they are special and unique and truly cared for?

We as the church are called to love God, and to love each other. We are called in that love, to serve God, and to serve the world. We cannot do this if we are so intent on helping everyone that we forget to love the person next to us with all that we have. We cannot love God and our neighbour as we are meant to if we end up cheating those closest to us of the love that they need in the name of trying to be sure that someone else gets what they need as well.

In Deuteronomy 15:10-11 we have marvellous words with a marvellous promise, the promise that when we are not grudging, that when we are in fact open handed, or extravagant towards our brothers and sisters that God will in turn bless us - and not just in some things, but in everything. This is the passage of scripture and the promise that Jesus alludes to when he says to Judas: "You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me." Everyone needs to be loved. Everyone needs to be treated as special..

This cannot happen if we are glued to our measuring sticks of who should be cared for and of who deserves just how much of our giving; nor can it happen, if we feel that we personally, are called to take care of everyone equally - because this too involves measuring and judging.

Prayer Space

Enduring God, as we come to worship you on Passion Sunday, we recognise the joy that lies beyond the deep agony.

You are the God of Love, not tight-lipped and grudging love, but love that laid down its life through Jesus, to take us through the darkest gulf of fear and pain to meet with Paradise. Who has done all this? Our God whom we adore, who died that we might live.

Suffering God, as we trace your journey to the cross, and see betrayal and pain in your eyes, we marvel at your love that looked beyond the grave. You made the world, and set the boundaries of sea and land, You formed us from the first to know you as our everything. Yet still you shrunk yourself to meet the wrench of death for us. Who has done all this?

Our God whom we adore, who died that we might live. Amen

Jesus, you walked among us as one of us; you gave up everything for us.

We are sorry for the times we have been unwilling to give to others.

Mary gave her gift of precious perfume in loving response to you.

Forgive us when we do not respond to your love for us.

Judas said the right thing but his heart was full of selfish motivation.

We are sorry when our selfish desires mean that we aren't motivated to love or care for others.

We are sorry, Lord, and ask for your forgiveness;

Hear us and bless us we pray.

Take our sins from us and fill us with your love. Amen

Extravagant God,

We praise you for the rich diversity of life for the many colours and fragrances, textures and flavours that we see, smell, touch, taste and enjoy

and we think of the woman at Bethany, who was not afraid to show her love and concern, not afraid to touch another's pain and be accepted in return.

Help us to appreciate the beauty of life, and to share our sense of wonder with others.

Help us to feel loved, to love ourselves, And to share your love with those around us. Amen.

Sermon contd.

We can only love in the way we are called to love, in the way that Mary loved, if we throw away our rule books and our measuring sticks, and love each person as fully as we possibly can, trusting, as we do so, in the righteousness of Christ, the saving grace of Jesus, to make it all come out right at end.

As long as we cling to the idea that saving the world is all up to us, that salvation comes because of what we do or what others do, we will be worried about our actions and our resources and our abilities, and we will end up failing to do as much as we are in fact able to do. But when we begin to forget these things, when we stop counting the costs and considering the consequences, and look only to the love that God has for us, and to the incredible record of his faithfulness, then we will be free to love as extravagantly, as completely, and as humbly as did Mary.

Extravagant love like that of Mary, is the kind of love to which we are called to. Indeed, it is the kind of love that Jesus himself showed us, when he, on the day after Mary anointed his feet and dried them with her hair, he rode into Jerusalem and gave himself up to death on a cross so that we, utterly undeserving that we are, might live forever with him and with the Father above.

Discussion Questions

Church is best done together but we know that this isn't always possible - particularly if you're housebound, isolated or even shielding. But why not contact a friend and arrange to watch the church service online or read the newsletter simultaneously and get in touch by telephone afterwards to talk about it. Below are some questions that might help you to reflect together!

1. Do you have a story of extravagance?
2. What does extravagant love mean to you?
3. How have you received extravagant love?
4. How have you or how might you demonstrate extravagant love?
5. What can you do to ensure that those closest to you are not negatively impacted by your extravagant actions to others?

Hymns and worship songs

Songs chosen for inclusion in the YouTube service:

Great God, your love has called us here - StF 499, H&P 500

I will offer up my life - StF 446, SOF 851

All I once held dear - StF 489, SOF 646

Just as I am, without one plea - StF 556, SOF 316, H&P 697

I, the Lord of sea and sky - StF 663, SOF 830

Please click on the song title to access YouTube clip of each song.

In person worship across the Circuit during the next four weeks...

March - May 2022		3rd Apr 5th of Lent Passion Sunday	10th Apr 6th of Lent Palm Sunday	17th Apr Easter Day	24th Apr 2nd of Easter
Balderton	8:30 am			Bates HC	
	10:30 am	Dalby	Gibson HC	LA	Ward T
	6:00 pm	Bates 4:00 pm			
Charles Street	8:30 am			Falla HC	
	10:30 am	JS with Hope at B'gate	Falla	Mathews	LA
	6:00 pm	Falla	Bates	Falla HC	Falla
Collingham	10:45 am	West	Bates US	Bates HC	Pearce
Elston	10:45 am		Hardy	Hibberts HC / 2pm	at Long Bennington JS / 10.30am
Hope Community	10:30 am	Falla with NMYBB at B'gate	Winnington Breakfast at H'ville / 9am	Falla HC / at B'gate	Falla at B'gate
Long Bennington	10:30 am	Bates	Morley	Hucknall T / HC	Hibberts JS
North End	6:00 pm	Bates	Falla	Bates HC	Hart
North Muskham	10:30 am		Hibberts	Hibberts at the Riverside HC / 7.30 am	Dalby T
	2:00 pm	Hibberts Café			
Southwell	10:30 am	Hibberts	Ward T	Hibberts HC	Hart
	Other	Hart 4pm	Hibberts PicC / 2pm		Hibberts Fringe / 6pm
Sutton-on-Trent	10:30 am	Hucknall T	LA Breakfast / 9am	US at Parish Church HC / 11am	Hardy US

For full plan, visit the Circuit Website:

<https://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk/newsroom/march-may-plan.html>