PASSION SUNDAY SERVICE 2020

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 ST MICHAEL’S CHURCH HOOLE

**The Sufferings of Jesus**

***“He himself bore our sin by his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live for righteousness” 1 Peter 2:24***

**Today we remember the sufferings of Jesus - his death on the cross which brought about our salvation. We can‘t worship together in our beautiful church building but we can still worship together in spirit in our homes. We can thank God for his great love for us in sending His Son to die for us; we can read His Word and be encouraged and strengthened, and we can pray for our families, our community, our world and ourselves.**

Let us pray:

**PRAYER FOR PASSIONTIDE AND THIS WEEK:**

Gracious Father, you gave up your Son out of love for the world:

lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,

that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our Saviour’s blood,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**John 12: 23-36.**

Jesus said, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

‘Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!’

Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, ‘This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted upfrom the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

The crowd spoke up, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain for ever, so how can you say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this “Son of Man”?’

Then Jesus told them, ‘You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.’

**SERMON**

Lord Jesus we pray that you will teach us through your Word more about your suffering for us and how we should follow you today. Amen.

On this Passion Sunday, we think of Jesus’s suffering leading up to the cross, but in particular the cross itself. These verses are a turning point in the Gospel. Before this Jesus has been saying, “My hour has not yet come”, But now Jesus says – “The hour HAS come” From now on, Jesus must focus on the cross

We learn two things in particular from our passage:

A. First of all, how to follow Jesus.

Jesus puts forward a principle that certainly applies to His own mission and crucifixion. As we have been seeing from our Christianity Explored course, Jesus came to die – to give His life as a ransom for many. And so Jesus speaks first of all about Himself. If Jesus had just left us a perfect example of how to live, we would have received encouragement, perhaps inspiration. But Jesus takes an illustration from horticulture and agriculture – a seed has to die before it bears fruit. The same is true of Jesus’ life. By giving his life as a ransom for many, Jesus has produced many seeds, resulting in the church.

But Jesus then goes on to apply this principle, which is true of His own death, to His followers. They too must die to self, if they are to follow their Master. They too must die to self, if they are ever going to experience eternal life. But it will be worth it, Jesus assures His followers. To die in this world and to live for Jesus will result in being honoured by God the Father.

B. Next the passage shows us how to COME to Jesus.

And the event that links these two themes is the cross. Here we see the fact that Jesus was fully human – he shrank from the cross. The One who said to His followers “Let not your hearts be troubled” now says that His OWN heart is troubled. There was clearly a longing in Jesus that He should be saved from this fate. A longing to avoid the physical and emotional anguish of the cross; and most of all the spiritual anguish of the cross, of being separated from God the Father.

But alongside the longing to avoid is the knowledge that this is what Jesus came to do, and so He prays “Father, glorify your Name”. And this prayer is immediately and dramatically answered by God the Father, speaking from Heaven.

Jesus then addresses the disciples, and points forward to his death by crucifixion. In doing so, He showed just how much the cross reversed the world’s judgment.

a) It looked for one thing, as if Jesus was being judged. Exactly the opposite, says Jesus in v 31. “Now is the time for judgment on this world.” The world, not Jesus, was judged on the cross. On that Good Friday, Pilate was being judged, the Sanhedrin was being judged, the crowd, the soldiers, all were being judged. Dame Clara Butt was once in India, singing on a river bank before a huge crowd. Her song was “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” When her clear beautiful voice had stopped singing, there was a short silence, and then a voice cried out “Yes, we were all there!” At the cross we were all being judged.

b) Not only that, it looked also at the cross as if Satan had triumphed. No, says Jesus, Satan has been defeated. “Now the prince of this world will be driven out” The cross meant complete and utter defeat for Satan.

c) Not only that, it also looked on the cross as though Jesus was dying alone, betrayed, deserted, forsaken. No, says Jesus when I am lifted up, I will draw all men to myself. The crowd do not understand Jesus, and ask : - what is this lifting up? Who is this Son of Man?

So Jesus makes a final appeal, in what is His last public sermon in John. “Walk in the light.” The light won’t be with you for ever, so come to the light while you still can. And so Jesus encourages the crowd both to come to Him, as the Light of the world, and to follow Him, to die to self.

So how do we apply this? How do we put into practice dying to self, especially during this self-isolation? I’m reminded of the remark made by one of 2 men, stranded on a desert island miles out in the ocean, where one said to the other “Well, we are where we are!” The same with us, and the virus isolation. We are where we are, so how about making the best of the situation?

1) Time. We have more time on our hands. How do we use it? How easy do you find it to pray on your own? How about using this unique time to develop a habit of praying, and learning to use those solitary half hours profitably.

2) People. If you live in a family, how about appreciating them all the more? We are normally very busy people. How about using the time to explore and develop the relationships with those around us? There may be opportunities for in-depth conversations that we don’t normally have

3) If you live on your own, or know people who live on their own, how about ringing them regularly? There may be friends or relatives on the other side of the country that you don’t see very often. Why not make a regular phone call to them a means of lifting their spirits?

4) What about that hobby you always intended to take up? Ann is learning Portuguese to speak to the grandchildren; I am reading Ann’s detective books to speak to Ann!

5) Give thanks constantly for the good things emerging. The national outpouring of clapping in gratitude to NHS and carers and helpers on Thursday night was a truly inspirational moment. Give thanks for the many good things that are being undertaken.

To conclude, this period of isolation is very hard on all of us. But there may well be some practical things we can do that we don’t normally get around to. How about seeing how many positives we can find during this time, in the period that lies ahead. Jesus said “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

Let us pray

**INTERCESSIONS**

Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He can transform death and despair, in any form, into life and hope.

As the whole world faces the most difficult and dangerous times that most of us have known let us remember this glorious truth.

Holy God, breathe your life into our Church and our world; breathe holiness and deepening faith; breathe energy, inspired teaching and continued praise; unblock all the barriers that stand between us and your love and make us more receptive to your gentleness and power.

Holy God, breathe your life into our universe as it struggles to come to terms with the spread and devastation caused by Covid 19, breathe responsible and constant caring and compassion, breathe right values and good stewardship ,peace , reconciliation, vision and most of all hope.

Holy God, breathe your life into our homes as so many more of us are unable or unwilling to go out, breathe increased patience and understanding particularly into those who are home schooling and working from home. Give us all the strength to live a Christian life in our example to family and friends alike.

Holy God, breathe your life and continued strength into all the frontline and essential workers in the NHS and food suppliers. Help us to help them by following the government guidelines and by being sensible in our own actions and responsive to the needs of others.

Holy God, breathe your life into all whom we know are sick, housebound, and isolated for whatever reason, breathe comfort and wholeness, forgiveness and new confidence and the knowledge of your constant love and presence.

Holy God, breathe your life into the dead and dying, breathe comfort for the journey and the realisation that you can be trusted. Breathe the life that lasts for ever. Give comfort to those who mourn.

Holy God, we know that you suffered before us and for us. As you laid down your life for us, let us lay down our lives for you and for others in full and complete commitment until you return in glory.

AMEN

**BLESSING**

Jesus said, ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’.

And so may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all those whom you love now and for evermore. Amen

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