

## Sermon for Lyn Valley Mission Community

Lent 5: Passion Sunday

Collect

Most merciful God,

Who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, delivered and saved the world:

grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever

Amen

Readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Romans 8:6-11 **John 11:1-45**

In writing and reading, may God be know, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Anglican church, this Sunday is known as Passion Sunday, taking us into Passiontide the final weeks of Lent. In Mark's gospel there is a point in his ministry when we are told Jesus "turned his face towards Jerusalem" and Passiontide is when we turn our thoughts towards preparation for Holy Week. This reminds us that Jesus' so called "Passion", though culminating in his death on the cross was also expressed in the experiences that led up to it. The gospel writers slow down their story telling as the gospel draws near its end, and as you read the final stories about Jesus' days in Jerusalem you can enter into them almost in "real" time. It is worth remembering this as we prepare for a very strange Holy Week and Easter, our Bibles themselves will be a great means of entering into day by day reflection on what Jesus did in a way that unites us with all who read and have read the same story year after year.

The word "passion" comes from a Latin root "passio" meaning to suffer. We tend to use the word "suffer" to refer to the experience of pain, but it has a wider sense of allowing any experience to have an impact or change us, to suffer something is for something to change us. Of course, change can often be painful, hence our

dominant use of the word, but change, even painful change can also have its gifts.

Jesus' death and resurrection has that truth and that hope at its heart.

The gospel given for this Sunday (John 11:1-45), the raising of Lazarus is the story of the last of the "signs" in John's gospel before the great sign of Jesus' own death and resurrection to come. It is a story that is full of high emotion and deep feelings, full of people experiencing things that change them, experiencing things that we might recognise as being really significant in human life, the things that really matter: love, loss, restoration. And right through the middle of the story of the pattern of the salvation (healing and wholeness) that is the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection that we have been drawn into by our baptism: God brings life from all that destroys life. God's final word is a gift of freedom from all that binds us, that is the ultimate gift of change to come.

I invite you to read through the passage slowly now, noticing all the instances of deep feeling and emotion:

- i) What do you notice Jesus feeling in what he does and what he says?
- ii) What do you notice the disciples feeling?
- iii) What do you notice Martha feeling?
- iv) What do you notice Mary feeling?
- v) What feelings are there among the bystanders?
- vi) I wonder what Lazarus was feeling?

My sense is, as with every deep human experience, there are no simple answers. Each character in the story shows a range reactions, which they probably don't fully understand themselves.

There is a deep love running through the story – Jesus' love for his friends, the sisters' love for their brother, the disciples' love for Jesus, prepared as they are to go with him to a place where his enemies are already seeking him. There is some confusion – the disciples not fully understanding that Lazarus has died. There is wide sympathy from the bystanders. Mary and Martha are in grief, trying to trust, perhaps saddened or resentful of Jesus' delay. Jesus

demonstrates deep compassion in his own pain at his friend's death. And then as Lazarus is called forth – perhaps feelings that can't be put into words. Something described as “believing in Jesus”: a deep recognition that Jesus brings indestructible life, even in the midst of pain and loss.

And I wonder where we are in this story.

As we take stock of what is going on around us, I am sure we can see many of the same emotions and deep feelings in reactions to the knowledge of a virus which is taking lives, and the efforts to stop it which are disrupting and confusing lifestyles. There is the same intensity and concentration on what people are discovering to be of real significance in our lives together: loss, life and love.

What are you feeling now?

Each of us will have our own mixture of emotions – we may identify with one of the characters in this story rather than others, we may still be trying to work out how we feel.

Jesus enters fully into the grief and confusion that illness and death bring. In this story he enters into it so fully that he is “greatly disturbed in spirit, and deeply moved” Jesus enters fully into the midst of people's dismay, sense of abandonment and let down, desire to hold onto belief. He enters into it so fully that it makes him weep. He suffers it alongside his friends, he allows it to change him even as he trusts in the glory of God. Jesus enters fully into the love between friends and family, and the sympathy of strangers and from within he cries out in trust to God for the life giving power of God to be made known and works his final sign, a final miracle which points towards the great mystery of his resurrection to come:

the great mystery that as he enters willingly into human suffering on the cross, so too he changes it into life eternal.

As his story's pattern is woven through the confusion of our gospel story today, so it is woven into the confusion of what we live through now.

My prayer for us, is that we can bring whatever we are feeling, whatever our emotional state is that:

whatever we are suffering, the changes we are experiencing to Jesus, just as each of the characters in our gospel today did

however we are feeling we can rely on his trust in the Father to bring life again and again out of all that is destructive

That we can hear him pray for us: "Father I thank you for having heard me" and discover each, in our own need, an unbinding from all that we are struggling with right now.

**Ever present God, Be our comfort in times of uncertainty, our stability in times of change, our peace through anxiety, our companion in all things. Amen**