

Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2025; Passion Sunday, Benefice BCP Holy Communion, Stonegrave.

Today is called Passion Sunday. The word passion conjures up various concepts. The Cambridge dictionary defines it as “a very powerful feeling, for example of attraction, emotional love, hate, anger or other emotion.” - all these are human emotions. People today can be passionate about all sorts of things and sometimes have “fits of passion” and do rash things that they later regret.

Greek philosophy defined passionate love in different ways; as *eros*, (romantic or physical love), *agape*, (unconditional, selfless love), *philia*, (friendship), *storge*, (family love) and *mania* (obsessive, controlling love from which we derive the word maniac!). We are all a mixture of these passions because we are human, and we are passionate beings.

In our Gospel today we also see examples - two very different kinds. Often, we understand love to simply be an emotion, a positive feeling, an attraction. While that can be an aspect of love it is not how love really is. Whether or not we love does not finally depend on our emotions but on our seeing clearly. Despite the old saying, love is not blind, seeing, knowing, and loving are always related. It is, strangely enough, the emotions that can blind us and keep us from loving and knowing in the deepest possible way. The 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian theologian Evagrius, described this deep loving and knowing and said, “*Agape* is the child of *apatheia*.” The Greek word *apatheia* is this deep love, which is free from the obsessions, compulsions, and the emotional agendas that often control and determine our life and love. *Apatheia* is the difference between Mary and Judas in today’s Gospel. Mary is free of the selfish emotions; the pouring out of her perfume is the pouring out of *apatheia*, unconditional, self-less pure love. Judas, however, is driven by his selfish emotions, mania. He says he loves Jesus, and later betrays him with the symbol of love - a kiss, behind which are emotions that give rise to self-interest and self-seeking, greed, fear, anger, jealousy, indifference, disappointment, regret. Driven by the passion mania, Judas is blind to *apatheia* and doesn’t see Jesus as Mary sees him and therefore is unable to truly love Him .

Mary shows by her actions that her love sees deeply and truthfully, penetrating below the surface of emotion, seeing the world differently as sacred, and she sees Jesus as her Lord. In the same way, if we look at the world with *apatheia*, we can see it as

something sacred too. If you see beauty, the wonder of creation, as the manifestation of God's self, you will love, but, if you simply see physical matter, impersonal stuff, or material objects you will not love the world with apatheia. When you look at a stranger, if all you see is another nameless, faceless individual in the crowd of life you will likely not love with apatheia but, if, however, you see a unique person, one created in the image and likeness of God, a brother or sister cherished by the same God who cherishes you, you will see and know love.

Apatheia, this seeing and knowing that leads to love does not happen with the physical eyes but with the eyes of the heart, the deepest and innermost part of our self, the very centre of our being. Mary's heart has been awakened and sees what Judas cannot. Mary sees the way, the truth, and the life. Judas sees opportunity and profits. Mary pours out all that she is and all that she has, Judas plans to steal and betray. They both had passion, and she holds back nothing, and gives unselfishly, but Judas despite his apparent conscience for the poor, was a liar and only wants to take and keep the purse for himself.

Today we begin Passiontide, and we enter the two weeks up to the crucifixion of Jesus. Here we are shown the Passion of Christ. Here, the word *passion* is from the Latin *pati*, which simply means "to endure" or "to suffer." referring to the time from Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane to His death on the cross—the time of His greatest suffering.

Now for us, it is through the passion of Christ that we are made right with God. It is important to note that Christ's suffering—His passion—was real. It is not as though He simply appeared to suffer; He actually suffered and died. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was in genuine anguish over what He was to suffer. When He was beaten and mocked, when the crown of thorns was pressed on His head, when He was nailed to a cross, when He hung there and struggled to breathe, He was experiencing genuine, excruciating suffering... for us. His passion was and is above all passions, all definitions of love, far beyond anything we can be worthy of and is given freely to us. He endured all that to save those who would trust in Him with love like no other, a love that is gifted to us as apatheia, a gift to us to share with the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.