

# **Sermon on Sunday 21 March 2021**

## **by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader for Worship**

*Gospel: John 12. 20-33*

### **Is there passion in your faith?**

So, here we are, two-thirds of the way through Lent; we are about to enter the final countdown to Easter. Next week is Palm Sunday. It seems to have come round very quickly and early this year. Maybe because the schools have only just gone back after Christmas. What strange times we live in.

As some, or most of you will know, today is commonly called Passion Sunday and this week heralds the season of Passiontide, which embraces Easter.

Passion is a much over-used term in modern culture, because it's used not so much to reflect deeply held convictions, but often to describe just passing superficial interests.

Recently, I've been interviewing candidates for a couple of jobs at work, on Zoom, of course. But, we still ask a series of questions. One of the questions that we often ask in job interviews is: *Tell me what you are passionate about*. It is an unspecified question; we're not giving the candidates any clue to a right answer, because there isn't one. It comes from left-of-field - *What are you passionate about?* The answer has to be personal and spontaneous and it can be, and often turns out to be, anything.

Sometimes you get an answer that reflects a broad, deep interest: *I'm passionate about human rights or social change or the environment*. Sometimes the answer is about a hobby or a pastime: *I love reading, I love the theatre; I'm passionate about*

*films and music.* Or it's about a football team or a sport generally, either watching it or playing it. *I love watching synchronised swimming.*

The answers are so varied, and people interpret the word 'passion' so differently, that it's often difficult to make comparisons.

Perhaps we should ask interview candidates something else? How about: *What are you willing to die for?* To answer that honestly would really test a person's commitment. And remember, it's not a joke in some situations or circumstances. It is rarely talked about openly, but you have to give that question at least passing consideration if you're in the armed forces, or the fire service or if you work for an aid agency in Yemen or, let's face it, if you've been working on the front line of the National Health for the last year. Are you prepared to take the risk of losing your life to do this job?

As we enter this first week of Passiontide and approach Easter, we have a few days left of Lent when we may have been considering our faith; thinking about our relationship with God. Are we passionate enough about it? What does passion for faith look like?

For the answer, go back to this morning's gospel. Here is Jesus, not just passionate about his faith but openly accepting that he has to die for it, for us: *'And what should I say — 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.'*

Jesus' relationship with God was one of father and son. No doubt. He knew what God wanted him to do. No doubt. He knew exactly what he needed to do. No doubt about it.

Some of you may have heard me say before that, after I left college, I worked in a hospital for a couple of years as a porter. And in that old hospital in Oxford was a chapel, where I used to go if

ever I needed a place for quiet reflection. It was usually empty and I would most often be alone.

One afternoon in late winter, when the lights were turned down softly, there was a woman in there. She was in a wheelchair, wrapped in a blanket, sitting quietly. Her eyes were open. She was aged about 50, I would say.

After a few minutes, I turned to her and gently asked if she was ok. She looked at me kindly and said that yes, things were more-or-less ok. Then she said: *'I was given a terminal diagnosis today. I'm going to die. I'm not scared about it. I've seen it coming for a long time. But do you know what the worst thing about it is? I don't know what God wants me to do with the time that is left.'*

It was a haunting question that has remained with me all my life. *What does God want me to do?* I'm sure many of us ask the same question all the time - in the short-term, the medium-term, the long-term; when we have to make decisions at home or at work, in our relationships, with everything we can refer to God and seek guidance and the right answer. What do you want me to do, God? And that's fine. That is what faith is about.

But this week, I'm going to turn it round. This week, it's time to ask the question: *What do I want to do for God before I die?* Because, following Christ's example, if you ask me, that's where passion in faith begins, by asking what do I want to do for God, rather than what can God do for me?



Amen.