

29th March 2020 - Passontide Reflections

Readings: Romans 8. 6-11; John 11. 1-45

The Second Sunday before Easter is now commonly called Passion Sunday. Why should this be?

James Atkinson (a former Head of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield) wrote this:

In the Christian context, the word applies exclusively to Christ's redemptive suffering particularly in the last days culminating in his crucifixion. It derives etymologically from the Latin "passio" (meaning "suffering").

But I wonder what Christ thought about the last few days of his earthly life. He must have known that the time had come for him to take on his enemies in Jerusalem for the last time when he is prepared to say to his accusers who he really was. He must have known too that he would be put to death in this confrontation with his enemies.

Today we could call someone "passionate" if that person earnestly pursues a course of action. I am sure we can say this of Jesus in the last few days of his earthly life.

A hymn we sing at Passontide calls Jesus' passion a "bitter passion". I think there is some truth in this because bitter passions can end in death and destruction.

We only have to look at the history of the two World Wars in the 20th Century and their aftermaths to see the truth of the words "bitter conflict".

But both our readings for this Sunday show us that there is something better to come.

In the Romans reading we see Paul telling us that Good Friday was not the end of the Jesus story when he says, “...if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, then the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give new life to your mortal bodies through his indwelling Spirit”.

Our second reading from John’s Gospel tells of the raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus. We can take this as a sign that points to the raising of Jesus from the dead on that first Easter Day.

So both these passages are hopeful ones that point us to Easter. And the message of hope and new life will help to take us through our now dark, scary and hard times.

It was the writer and poet Sir John Betjeman who said “But Monday is so much worse for those of us who haven’t any hope. Faith, hope and charity. O give me hope.”

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