

**Fifth Sunday of Lent,
Passion Sunday, 3rd April 2022**



Dear Friends,

‘You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.’
(John 12: 8)

We have arrived at the Fifth Sunday of Lent, a day of worship in our liturgical calendar known as Passion Sunday, which marks the beginning of Passiontide and our journey via Palm Sunday to the Cross. If you listen carefully, perhaps you can hear the clock ticking?

It is 6 days before the time of the Passover, a focal point in the Jewish calendar, commemorating Israel’s exile from Egypt. Thousands of observant Jews have left their villages and are making their way to Jerusalem for the ceremony of cleansing, by which they will be made ritually pure, in order to eat the sacred Passover meal. Amid the dizzying rush of the crowds, the noise of bleating goats and the raucous play of children, the disciples’ hearts race with nervous energy. They sense something amazing is about to happen, but they are not exactly sure what...

In the midst of all this, we find Jesus in Bethany, sharing a meal with his friend, Lazarus - that same Lazarus, whom Jesus had only days before raised from the dead! The shockwaves of his miraculous resurrection are still reverberating around the City. The priests and the Pharisees want Jesus silenced. They are afraid. They want Lazarus dead too... his return to life has been the last straw...

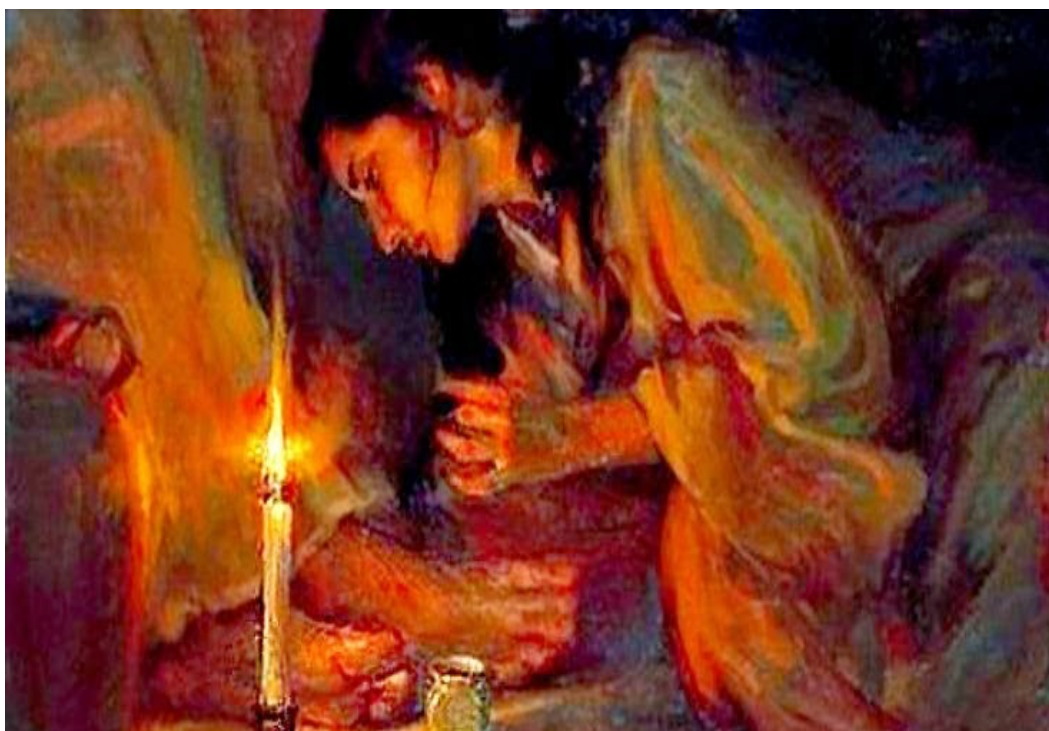
The clock is ticking... In a few days, Jesus will gently explain to those who loved Him that *‘My time has come.’* This meal then is a pivotal moment, both for Jesus, for His followers ... for you and me.



'Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany' by Francisco Borboa

The room is crackling with the tension of death and re-birth. John's gospel gives us a *specific* account of *Judas'* dialogue with Jesus around the meal table. Matthew and Mark tell us that *all the disciples* are shocked by Mary's use of so much expensive perfume to honour Jesus, yet John homes in on Judas' pious-sounding condemnation of Mary's instinctive and loving recognition of Jesus as her Lord and Saviour.

And the enigmatic response from Jesus: *'Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor, but you will not always have me.'* Is this Jesus being selfish? Or is he exposing the beliefs of those who had rejected Him and who, in that moment were plotting to kill Him?



'Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet' by Kathe Sep

We hear that the house was filled with the fragrance of Mary's expensive perfume. If we breathe in deeply enough, we can also smell the stench of betrayal mingling in with the Nard. Clever Judas, pharisaic in his gift for trying to twist Mary's motive from being one of honouring Jesus to one of reckless extravagance: Planting a seed of doubt perhaps in the minds of those present as to the Lordship of their guest?

Yet Jesus puts them straight. He upholds Mary's actions. In doing so, he doesn't justify ignoring the needs of the poor. Instead, he quotes from Deuteronomy 15:11 *'There will always be some in the land who are poor.'* Rather, Jesus is highlighting the special sacrifice which Mary is making to Jesus. She herself is poor, yet she is prepared to give Jesus all the riches she has.

And the clock ticks ... All the while, Lazarus watches quietly on. His very presence in the room screams out the truth. He wouldn't be there but for the miraculous intervention of Jesus in raising him from the dead. Lazarus is a witness to Jesus' power over death just as Mary is a witness to the violence and deceit into which Judas gets caught up.



'Christ with Arms Raised' by Georges Rouault

This text asks us to hear and see and smell and touch and speak out the truth of these last days of Jesus. Where are you in this room? Where do you stand?

- With Mary in her unfailing belief?
- With Judas in his doubt and confusion?
- With Lazarus as he stands in witness to the new life God has blessed him with?

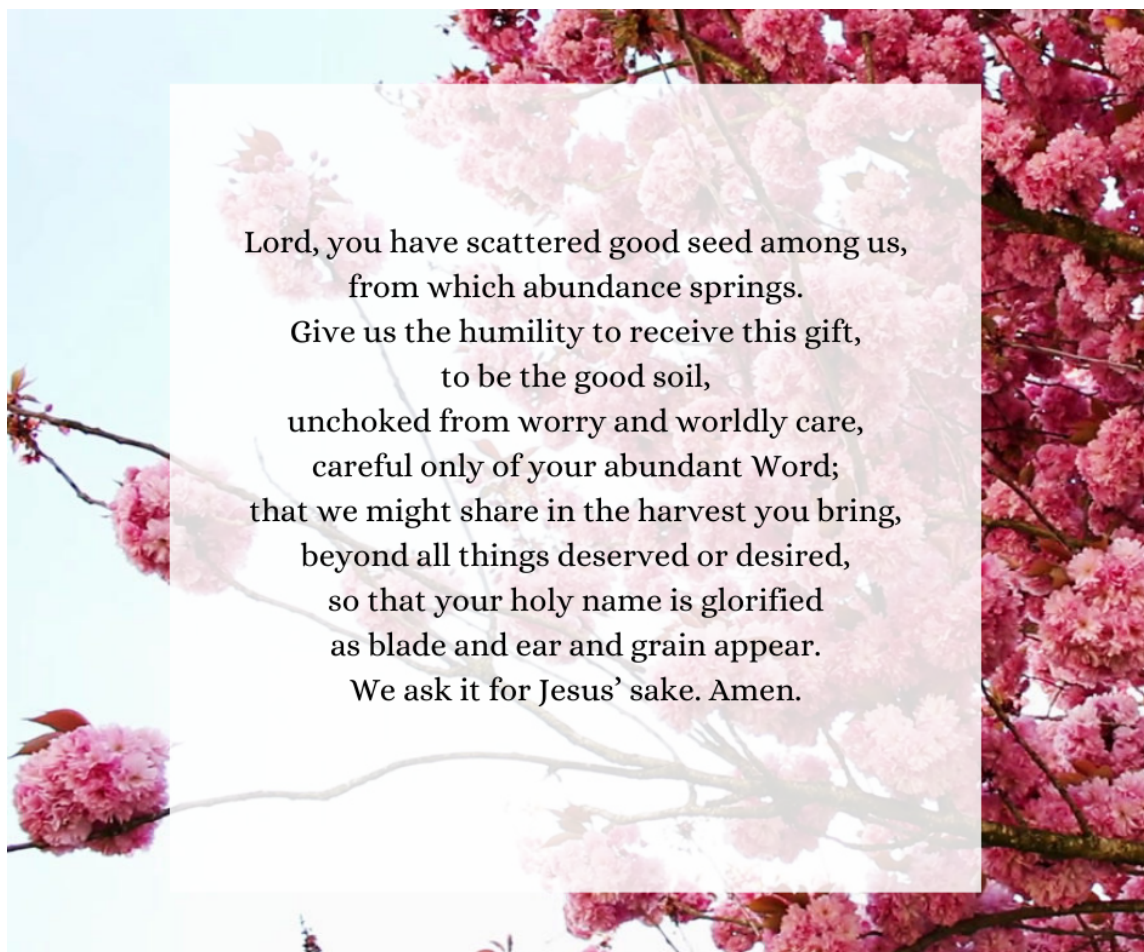
It is easy for us to side with Mary as she worships at the feet of Jesus with abandon. Not quite so easy for us to glimpse ourselves in Judas. Perhaps even harder for us to stand in Lazarus' shoes in those moments when Christ asks us to show His face to others.

Listen ... the clock is ticking... and Jesus is asking us who live on the other side of His resurrection - to sacrifice ourselves to God each day and in everything we do. We too must be ready to be crucified.

Yours, in the passion of Christ,

Jax
Rector, The Downs Benefice

In among our prayers for Ukraine and the many other areas of our hurting world, Dean Catherine and Winchester Cathedral have issued this prayer for our Diocese, and Bishops Debbie and David have asked us to incorporate it into the prayer life of our parishes:



Collect Prayer for the Fifth Sunday of Lent

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 for ever. Amen.



John 12: 1-8 - Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. 'It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.'

STOP PRESS

Sparsholt Memorial Hall - Saturday 2nd April **CANCELLED - Karis Kids film**

We hope to run this event later in the year.

Benefice Lent Reflections

This year, we are hosting a series of Lent talks around our parish churches reflecting on the life and works of remarkable Christian activists. Please see the schedule of talks below. Do make a point of coming along as part of your Lenten meditations.

Dr Cicely Saunders (1918-2005) – Founder of the Hospice Movement. (Crawley – Monday 7th March)

John Wesley (1703-1791) - Leader of a revival movement within the Church of England which gave birth to the Methodist Church. (Sparsholt – Wednesday 16th March)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) - German pastor who wrote 'The Cost of Discipleship' and was interned by the Nazis for his resistance to Adolf Hitler. (Littleton – Tuesday 22nd March)

Gladys Aylward (1902-1970) - Missionary to China depicted in the film 'The Inn of the Sixth Happiness' starring Ingrid Bergman. (Wherwell – Thursday 31st March)

Wilson Carlile (1847-1942) – Founder of The Church Army – (Chilbolton – Friday 8th April)

These talks will be held in the Churches and start at 7pm

Date	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8th April					Chilbolton
Holy Week				Maundy Thursday	Good Friday

Schedule of Services

Now that all national Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, it is no longer necessary to book seats in our parishes for services. Neither is it mandatory for you to wear

masks in church. However, Coronavirus is still very much with us. There are a number of people in our villages with it at present, so we are encouraging people to observe social distancing measures.

As our services begin to open up again, we have a wide range of sacramental and lay-led services on offer. Of particular note, Peace and Wholeness begins again on 20th March at St Catherine's, Littleton. St Mary's, Crawley and St Stephen's Sparsholt are enjoying new lay-led Morning Worship services on 3rd and 4th Sundays respectively.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>3rd April</i>	Morning Prayer	Holy Communion	4pm – Café Church with Karis Kids		
<i>10th April Palm Sunday</i>	<i>Palm Sunday Service with Wh</i>		Holy Communion with a Donkey Procession	Palm Sunday Service with a Donkey Procession	Palm Sunday Service
	6pm – Benefice Evensong to pray for Ukraine and World Peace				
<i>14th April Maundy Thursday</i>				6pm - Holy Communion with Washing of the Feet	
<i>15th April Good Friday</i>	<i>With Wh</i>	10am - Easter Garden	12 noon - Good Friday Meditation		3pm - Good Friday Meditation
<i>17th April EASTER SUNDAY</i>	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Service	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Holy Communion	Easter Service
<i>24th April</i>			Morning Prayer	Morning Worship	8am – BCP Holy Communion
<i>27th April WEDNESDAY</i>			Holy Communion		