

## **Passion Sunday 22 March 2026**

**John 11: 1-45**

**St James Church, Shirley,**

### **Costly Service**

#### **Passion Sunday**

Today is known as Passion Sunday and it marks a turning point. Up to now, Lent has invited us to reflect, to examine ourselves and to consider what it means to follow Christ, *generally*. But today the season changes and the focus narrows. The shadow of the cross casts upon the Gospel reading, and we begin to walk with Jesus into the heart of his costly, self-giving love.

Passion Sunday reminds us that Christian faith is not simply about ideas or virtues – or Lent about giving up chocolate, or sugar in my case; it is about a God who enters suffering rather than avoiding it. A God who chooses solidarity with us on earth over the safety of heaven. A God whose love is embodied, vulnerable and willing to bear the weight of the world's pain and sin.

This is the moment in the year when we remember that love, real love, always costs something. It is not sentimental. It is not shallow.

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Passion Sunday invites us to see the depth of God's commitment to us, and to recognise that the path of discipleship will, at times, draw us into places where we too must love in ways that stretch us. The cross is not something that went wrong in Jesus' ministry; it is culmination of it.

#### **Lazarus and the cost of service**

John 11 is often remembered as a joyful miracle story - the raising of Lazarus, and the victory of life over death. But if we look closely, it is also a story about the cost of service. Jesus does not perform this miracle from a safe distance. He chooses to return to Judea knowing full well the danger that awaits him. The disciples remind him: "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you." Yet Jesus goes anyway. He goes because love draws him toward the place of pain, not away from it. And they, knowing the danger, go with him!

And when he arrives, he does not stand above the grief. He enters it. He weeps. He is "greatly disturbed in spirit." His service is not detached or 'professional; it is costly, emotional and deeply human. And the raising of Lazarus becomes the moment that seals his fate.

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From this point on, the authorities decide he must die. In other words, Jesus' act of service — restoring life to a friend — becomes the very act that leads him to the cross. John wants us to see that service, in the way of Christ, is much more than being helpful, nice or kind. It is about being faithful, even when faithfulness demands everything.

#### **Christian service**

The Lent book's theme of service dovetails with this Gospel reading. We often imagine service as something gentle, rewarding, even pleasant — volunteering, helping-out, doing good when it fits in with the other things in life. But Christian service, shaped by the example of Jesus, is something deeper and more demanding. It asks us to step into places of need, grief, difficulty and sometimes danger. It asks us to show up when it is inconvenient, to care when it is draining, to love when it is misunderstood, to sacrifice other things in our lives. Service is cost.

But, this cost is not without hope. In John 11, Jesus' costly service becomes the doorway to resurrection life. Our acts of service — however small — join in with the breaking into the world of God's kingdom.

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When we sit with someone in their loneliness, when we advocate for someone who has no voice, when we offer compassion in a moment of pain, we are not simply being kind - we are joining Christ in the work of bringing life where death seems in charge. Service is costly, yes — but it is also the place where resurrection life begins to take root.

#### **Draw Near**

In the Draw Near reflections this week, we've been reminded again and again that Christian service is not trying to get a medal, but a willingness to follow Christ into costly places. We heard James and John asking for the seats of honour, imagining glory without sacrifice — and Jesus gently but firmly redirecting them. “Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant; whoever wishes to be first must be slave of all.” They wanted status; Jesus offered service. They wanted crowns; Jesus spoke of a cup of suffering.

Later in the week we were taken to the margins — to the places where service is uncomfortable, unnoticed, misunderstood or criticised. We were invited to consider those who are overlooked or even vilified, and to ask what it means to draw near to them with compassion. Service sometimes means giving time, energy, and resources we feel we barely have.

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It means entering situations we know will affect us, stretch us, make us unpopular and unsettle us. Not all of us are called to every form of service of course, but all of us are called to look beyond our own families, beyond the church walls, and to seek the flourishing of the whole community — especially those in deepest need or facing the greatest change.

But the good news — the really good news — is that we never serve alone. God places us in a community, a church not only for worship but for mission, for shared service. If all we do with our faith is attend worship, we are not expressing the fulness of our faith. Our church's logo says 'Knowing Christ – making Him known' -that's worship and mission – praise and service.

And even more wonderfully, the Holy Spirit has gifted every Christian purposefully. Each of us carries gifts designed for service, gifts entrusted to us for the sake of others. The tragedy is how many Christians never discover them, never use them, never imagine that God has equipped them for a unique purpose. Each one of us has a particular calling that God has created us to do. Imagine reaching the end of our lives and realising we left God's gifts unopened.

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What a waste that would be. Instead, Passiontide invites us to draw near to Christ, to recognise the gifts he has placed within us, and to offer them — however small — in costly, life-giving service.

**Our service**

As we enter Passiontide and draw near to Holy Week, may we walk closely with the Christ who goes ahead of us — the One who loves with a costly, courageous love. May we recognise the gifts God has placed within us, and find fresh confidence to offer them for the sake of others. May we discover companions on the road, knowing that service is never a solitary calling but a shared vocation. And as we follow Jesus into these solemn, holy days, may we see again that every act of love, however small, becomes part of God's work of bringing life out of death and hope out of sorrow. Let us go into this sacred season ready to draw near, to serve, and to trust the God who equips us and walks with us. Amen.

*Rev'd Richard Haynes Passion Sunday 22 March 2026*